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Severed Soul: Disenchantment and the Evolution of the American Novel

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April 30, 2019
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Introduction – A Disenchanted World

In his book *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor charts a transformation that has occurred in the Western world over the course of the last several hundred years, from what Taylor names our “enchanted” past, to our modern, secular, “disenchanted” existence. Beginning in Europe in the 1500s near the time of the Reformation, this transformation is at its core a shift from the enchanted belief that meaning, value, and divine influence exist within nature and objects themselves, to the belief that meaning exists only within the human mind (Smith 29), that nature is brute, and that God, if He exists, may have created the universe, but is no longer directly present in its movements. In an enchanted world, meaning and answers can be found in both the material and the transcendent realm. In a disenchanted world, any answer widely accepted by society must be based on empirically assessable (or at least naturalistically plausible) facts and “thick rationality” (Bilgrami 2), a socially defined system of reasoning, which excludes all appeals to transcendence as irrational.

On a more subtle yet no less important level, Taylor argues that disenchantment has led to what he calls the “buffered self” (Smith 30), the isolation of man within his own conscience, separated both from his fellow man and from his environment. This buffering, or having “closed the porous boundary between inside (thought) and outside (nature, the physical)” (Taylor 300), arose through a myriad of processes, such as “the replacement of a cosmos of spirits and forces by a mechanistic universe” and the “rise of disengaged reason” (300) among others. Such buffering served to alleviate an intense “sense of vulnerability” that earlier humans experienced vis-à-vis outside “spirits and

forces” (300). However, such buffering “can also be lived as a limit, even a prison, making us blind or insensitive to whatever lies beyond this ordered human world and its instrumental-rational projects. The sense can easily arise that we are . . . cut off from something, that we are living behind a screen” (302). Living as we are, completely engulfed in this disenchanted realm, it is often difficult to understand what Taylor means by this loss of “enchantment.” American society is still for the large part a religious one, and the majority of citizens, if asked, would likely say that they believed in God; what then has changed? What has changed is what Taylor calls our “social imaginary”, the foundational, unconscious, and typically unquestioned basis of a society’s understanding of itself and its world. In our enchanted past, belief in an ultimate divine force was an integral part of the social imaginary, and disbelief was almost unheard of. Today, belief is still one choice among many, but it is just that, a *personal* choice, no longer part of the fabric of our cultural self-understanding. Furthermore, in this transition from shared to personal belief, we have lost much of what underwrote communal life and provided an axiomatic basis of understanding between individuals.

Perhaps the most powerful method to witness and comprehend the transition from the enchanted to disenchanted mindset is to read the literature produced at different periods in the history of the Western world. In his book *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, Georg Lukács describes the enchanted mindset of those ancient cultures that produced the world’s great epics and myths. He suggests that for them, “The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self . . . are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one

another” (Lukács 29). The ancient Greeks, about whom Lukács is speaking here, understood themselves as existing within a series of closed spheres, the largest—that which enclosed all others--being the heavens. Lukács argues that this mode of existence enabled the Greeks to maintain a firm understanding of their place in this world:

When the soul does not yet know any abyss within itself . . . when the divinity that rules the world and distributes the unknown and unique gifts of destiny is not yet understood by man, but is familiar and close to him as a father is to his small child, then every action is only a well-fitting garment for the world (30).

Lukács contrasts this ancient state of understanding to (what Taylor would call) the “social imaginary” of the modern West, and consequently, the modern novelist. As Taylor explains, the modern Western man must appeal to his spiritually denuded, material surroundings instead of the transcendent realm for understanding. Although this has allowed modern man to expand his scientific knowledge of the world far beyond that of the closed spheres of the Greeks, he has done so at the cost of losing the intrinsic understanding of world and self that such simultaneously closed yet transcendent spheres enabled. We now understand the world at an extreme level of mechanistic detail, but at the same time, transforming the world into a mechanistic plane has made it something cold and foreign to ourselves. Lukács writes, “Our world has become infinitely large and each of its corners is richer in gifts and dangers than the world of the Greeks, but such wealth cancels out the positive meaning – the totality – upon which their life was based” (34).

The consequence of this new disenchanted system of belief is that man no longer has any means of finding resonance between himself and his surroundings. What

resonance could there be between reasoning man and brute object when the unifying force of a divine will has been stripped away, and the world around us has been reduced to physical mechanism? This has created what Lukács calls “an unbridgeable chasm between cognition and action, between soul and created structure, between self and world . . . between us and our own selves” (34). It has created an “interiority” and an “exteriority” (66) that are now distinctly separated where once they were continuous. Bruno Latour describes this phenomenon and its consequences in more concrete terms in *An Attempt at a “Compositionist Manifesto.”* He suggests that the process of “modernization” has attempted to render nature as a kind of self-contained, inert yet “study-able” domain, separate from the society of man. And yet, he reasons, man and nature are blatantly continuous, and so it is impossible for anything to exist only within or only outside of “nature” as a created category: “Of course, no human, no atom, no virus, no organism has every resided ‘in’ nature understood as *res extensa*. They have lived in the pluriverse . . . where else could they have found their abode?” (Latour 7). It is no wonder then, if this “chasm between self and world” defines the disenchanted west, that the consequences of such a division would define the modern West’s unique and dominant literary form: the novel.

Lukács argues that the Western novelist trapped in the chasm between world and self has two options for addressing this separation in his writing. His first option is to attempt to ignore it and instead focus on complete, although inevitably shallow, description and mastery of a very limited and tangible piece of his world. In Lukács’ words, this type of novelist chooses to “narrow down and volatilize whatever has to be given form to the point where they can encompass it” (Lukács 38). To “volatilize”

literally means to cause something to “pass off into vapor”¹, so this breed of novelist essentially boils off any evidence of the “irreconcilable chasm” in the subject about which they write, until they have an easily digestible nugget. If this is the approach of the author, then there is often a disparity felt between the real world and the world portrayed in this form of the novel; there is a sort of hole where wrestling with the chasm between self and world has been carefully avoided, and consequently such approaches to the novel often lack depth.

An example of this form of the novel would be *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) by Jane Austen. *Sense and Sensibility* focuses exclusively on the sensationalized conflicts and triumphs of the social and romantic interactions of two well-off English sisters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. Austen includes light social and moral commentary, or, as one anonymous reviewer from 1812 phrased it, the novel has “many sober and salutary maxims for the conduct of life” within a “very pleasing and entertaining narrative” (Anonymous 313). However, while Austen may subtly criticize specific behaviors or opinions of England’s upper class, there is never the slightest intimation of pervasive flaws or absences in the social imaginary of the society about which she writes. In the end of the novel, nothing has changed about upper class English society, but the good characters (the Dashwood sisters) have happy endings, the bad characters get what they deserve, and the conflict is considered to be entirely resolved; the individual dramas have been righted and so all is well in the world. Perhaps an even more emblematic example of the volatilized novel would be *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. Defoe spends the vast majority of *Robinson Crusoe* describing, in exceptional physical and mathematical

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/volatilize>

detail, the provisions and lodgings that Crusoe has accumulated and built for himself. By focusing so exclusively on the physical, Defoe “volatilizes” or rather boils off and therefore largely avoids considering, the profound and prolonged moral and emotional turmoil that one in Crusoe’s situation would likely be experiencing.

Alternatively, Lukács suggests that the author can utilize irony to acknowledge the insurmountable divide that exists in disenchanted modernity, and integrate it into the form of his story. As Lukács explains it, these novelists, “carry the fragmentary nature of the world’s structure into the world of forms” (39). This irony Lukács describes as the “mature man’s knowledge that meaning can never quite penetrate [modern] reality, but that, without meaning, reality would disintegrate into the nothingness of inessentiality” (88). When utilizing this irony, the author *does* acknowledge the experience of this lack of resonance between self and world in modern life (although often not explicitly), and the ways in which his characters find themselves at the edge of this unbridgeable chasm becomes foundational to the narrative. Regardless of the approach the novelist chooses, however, Lukács suggests the divide remains insurmountable.

Here, I examine several American novels, spanning the course of the past century, and utilize them as lenses through which to view the evolution and potential future of the disenchanted state of being in America. I argue, via Lukács, that the vast majority of modern Western novelists are themselves only familiar with a disenchanted existence. Therefore, they perceive that some elusive yet crucial element has been lost, but they do not know *what* or *how*; so they simply feed back to their readers their own sense of absence without offering a genuine explanation or solution. I wish, however, to challenge Lukács’ assertion that such a state of affairs is intractable and that the novel is

incapable of repairing this rupture between world and self. I believe that America's fraught yet unique history has given rise to an environment in which pockets of enchantment persist within a profoundly disenchanted nation; out of this environment have arisen authors who straddle the disenchanted and enchanted spheres and are intimately familiar with both. These writers are therefore capable of working within the emblematic form of disenchanted modernity, the novel, while also benefitting from a framework of belief that enables them to imbue the novel with a true understanding of the potential riches of enchantment. By working within the familiar form of the novel, they avoid ostracizing disenchanted readers with wholly enchanted and therefore inaccessible forms, while still communicating greater insight into the nature of disenchantment and greater hope for the accessibility of future enchantment.

For much of this paper, I will focus on the buffered relationship between human and nature in the modern American novel as an emblem of disenchantment at large, and as an indication of the given novel's degree of disenchantment. The buffering humans have come to experience between one another is just as prevalent and equally emblematic, but it is a much subtler phenomenon compared to the blatant erasure of the natural world from the majority of American novels. Furthermore, perhaps the most fundamental point of *both* Taylor and Lukács, is that in developing the belief that meaning exists only within our own minds, we became buffered from *everything* outside of our minds, including nature *and* other humans, because our interiority and all that makes up our exteriority are no longer of "the same essential nature." Therefore, in any example where a division between human and nature is witnessed, a division between human and fellow human can be understood to exist as well.

The four novels closely examined here--*Light in August* (1932) by William Faulkner, *Housekeeping* (1980) by Marilynne Robinson, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J.D. Salinger, and *Ceremony* (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko--show many different faces of the novel. However, when studied together, they reveal not only a powerfully illustrative picture of the growth of disenchantment in America over the past century, but also the potential for the novel to be transformed from an emblem of disenchantment to a tool for re-enchantment. In Chapter One, I examine the role of nature in *Light in August*, the oldest of the four novels studied here. *Light in August* offers a clear example of how the buffering between man and nature can be seen to diminish as one moves backward in time. The protagonist Lena's increased contact and intimacy with nature corresponds to an implicit faith in the world, reminiscent of what Lukács believed the ancient "integrated civilizations" that produced the epic, experienced. I then contrast Lena's contact with nature and attendant faith, with the relationship to nature experienced by the characters of the more modern novel *Housekeeping*. The main characters in *Housekeeping* experience abundant contact with nature from a young age, and one might therefore expect them to develop a faith in the world not unlike Lena's. However, I argue that the almost fifty years separating the publication and setting of the two novels corresponds to an alteration in the dominant social attitude toward nature. In Lena's time, the amount of contact Lena has with nature is socially normative for her socioeconomic milieu. However, in the time period that *Housekeeping* is set, and in the higher socioeconomic milieu that the characters of *Housekeeping* occupy, such a high level of contact with nature is viewed as socially deviant. The main characters are therefore trapped by a dominant social structure that lacks "fullness" but which simultaneously eschews the level of contact with nature

that could help to alleviate such an absence. Constrained by these limitations, the characters of *Housekeeping* display a dual fascination with and fear of, the natural elements that surround them, but lack completely the implicit faith in the world witnessed in Lena. The juxtaposition between *Light in August* and *Housekeeping* serves to illustrate how a significant increase in the degree of buffering in the American social imaginary over the course of the twentieth century, can be witnessed through the study of the novels spanning this same time period. I then compare *Housekeeping* to *The Catcher in the Rye*, as a means by which to illustrate that modern American novels can and often do reach a much more profound level of intractable buffering than what is expressed in *Housekeeping*. I conclude the chapter by using Salinger and *Catcher* as an example of why American novels are so often limited in their scope due to their authors themselves having no enchanted experiences or belief systems on which to base an alleviation of their protagonist's buffered state.

In Chapter Two, I begin by arguing that novels such as *Housekeeping* and *The Catcher in the Rye* present to their readers poignant renderings of the “chasm between self and world,” but ultimately they portray only the consequences of modern disenchantment, without offering either potential causes or potential solutions. This is because the authors of the novel lack an enchanted perspective or framework of belief, just as their characters do. I introduce *Ceremony* as a counterpoint to this dominant form of the modern American novel, suggesting that *Ceremony* acts as a microcosm of the larger disenchantment narrative that Taylor paints in *A Secular Age*, and then goes beyond even Taylor to offer a framework for how America and the disenchanted West may begin to re-enchant itself. Such a feat is enabled by the fact that *Ceremony* is written

by a Native American author who has experienced the enchanted framework of belief that so many modern American novelists lack. The forced colonial disenchantment of Native American populations occurred much more recently, much more rapidly, and often much more partially, than the overarching disenchantment narrative as presented by Taylor. This accelerated process of colonial disenchantment has allowed some pockets of enchantment to thrive in native communities, and in some cases, has enabled native authors to communicate much greater understanding of the roots of disenchantment, and greater hope for something beyond it, to their readers.

In Chapter 3, I study the structural and formal choices utilized by Silko that enable *Ceremony* powerfully and convincingly to communicate enchanted beliefs to a widely disenchanted audience. I argue that by sparingly but strategically interweaving Laguna legends into the text, and by very gradually introducing more enchanted elements into what begins as a strictly realist story set in a profoundly buffered world, Silko is able to transform her story from one that closely resembles Lukàcs' conception of the modern novel to one that is more reminiscent of Lukàcs' theory of the warmly integrated world of the ancient epic. By smoothly transitioning from one to the other, Silko succeeds in framing the ancient enchanted world of the epic (which Lukàcs posits as an irretrievable ideal) as the true reality of our modern world, to which we, in our buffered state have simply been blind.

Chapter One – Natural Alienation

Chapter one examines how the presence of nature in American life has declined sharply over the course of the past two centuries, and how this decline can be witnessed

in the novels produced over the course of the twentieth century. *Light in August* offers an example of a society in closer contact with nature, while *Housekeeping* illustrates a more modern society, which has evolved more stringent social norms aimed to combat intimate interaction with nature. The consequences of such a change can be witnessed in the characters' of these novels divergent attitudes toward their world. I then invoke *The Catcher in the Rye* as a novel in which an almost complete erasure of the natural world from the text corresponds to an even more profound level of buffering than that witnessed in *Housekeeping*, and I suggest that Salinger's own disenchanting life is responsible for his inability to suggest any successful alleviation of his protagonist's buffered state.

The trap in which Lukács believes the Western novelist finds himself, can readily be recognized in the way the Western novel relates to nature. In a similar fashion, the novel's relationship to nature splits between almost complete avoidance and a sort of either strained existence or detached fascination. Following Lukács' characterization of those authors who entirely avoid the chasm of the Western mind, are those novels, which seem to be almost completely void of any meaningful relationship with nature whatsoever. This alienation from nature often exhibited in modern Western literature, is only possible when the society that created said literature is itself alienated from nature; such a condition is largely dependent on the society's ability to actually achieve physical separation from the forces of nature. By contrast, there are parts of the world (much of South America, Africa, and India among others), which retain, to greater or lesser degrees, an enchanted worldview. They are not governed by a chasm between world and self because a spiritual and long-standing relationship to the surrounding nature is in many cases a defining aspect of the culture that has never been lost. This understanding

of the world is reflected in genres such as magical realism, which shares many characteristics with the realist novel in terms of structure and form, but which allows for an intertwining of the spiritual, the supernatural, and the firmly immanent and concrete, in a way that the Western novel is deeply uncomfortable with, if not completely incapable of achieving. What many of these non-Western authors of magical realism have in common, is that their countries are often dominated by extreme natural environments that consistently assert their presence and power and refuse to be cloistered, reduced, or avoided. In his piece “On the Marvelous Real in America”, Alejo Carpentier, a Cuban national, describes the powerful nature of the Caribbean jungle:

when André Masson tried to draw the jungle of Martinique, with its incredible intertwining of plants and its obscene promiscuity of certain fruit, the marvelous truth of the matter devoured the painter, leaving him just short of impotent when faced with blank paper. It had to be an American painter . . . who taught us the magic of tropical vegetation, the unbridled creativity of our natural forms with all their metamorphoses and symbioses (Carpentier 85).

Marilynne Robinson’s novel *Housekeeping*, set in the mountains of the Pacific Northwest, occupies a very different environment than the lush jungle of the Caribbean, but they are similar in their resistance to taming of any kind and in their ability to daunt the human mind. When describing the town, Robinson states, “Fingerbone was never an impressive town. It was chastened by an outsized landscape and extravagant weather” (Robinson 62). Robinson’s term “outsized landscape” perfectly encapsulates the aspects of these environments that are too large, too intense, too wild to enable human efforts to domesticate and/or ignore them.

While significant swaths of the non-West have largely managed to retain an intimate connection to nature, as reflected in the literature they produce, the degree to which nature is purged from Western literature has steadily increased as Western cultures have developed ever more efficient ways of curbing and avoiding the forces of nature. In the developed West today, nature has been thoroughly diminished and circumscribed. We live in insulated homes with heat and air conditioning, all but impervious to winter storms and summer heat. We drive cars vast distances on paved roads; our cities grow, and forests shrink. The amount of virgin land is diminished by the day and almost no patch or mile is left undiscovered or unclaimed. It is no wonder then that we can persist in our delusion of a division between man and nature when every structure of the modern West serves to support that delusion and buffer us from those forces of nature--forces that have the potential to remind us not only of the insurmountable power that resides in them, but also of our own existence within and inferiority to that power. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor uses the term “exclusive humanism” to define an unprecedented and foundational aspect of the modern Western “social imaginary”: “For the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option. I mean by this a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing” (Taylor 18). Exclusive humanism is closely intertwined with Taylor’s concept of “the immanent frame,” in which all meaning and significance comes to be “enclosed within the material universe and natural world” (James 48). Both Lukács and Taylor suggest that when human understanding is circumscribed at this level, it is often difficult to maintain the impression of “meaning and significance” in the world. The state of resonance Lukács describes, where “The

world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars,” is similar to the state of being Taylor describes as “fullness”; and both are antithetical to the one-dimensional *telos* of exclusive humanism contained within an immanent frame. Taylor defines “fullness” broadly as the state of being where “life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worthwhile, more admirable, more what is should be” (Taylor 5), but which “the reductive materialist account of human beings leaves no place for” (596). It is this state of “fullness” which Lukács believes the novelist most struggles to achieve. He speaks of a subset of characters and authors of the novel who deeply feel the absence of fullness and are desperate to achieve it, but are unable to understand what it is they lack:

because of . . . the absence of an effective God, the indolent self-complacency of this quietly decaying life would be the only power in the world if men did not sometimes fall prey to the power of the demon and overreach themselves . . . Then, suddenly, the God-forsakenness of the world reveals itself as a lack of substance . . . and the empty transience behind which attractive landscapes were previously to be seen is suddenly transformed into a glass wall against which men beat in vain, like bees against a window, incapable of breaking through, incapable of understanding that the way is barred (Lukács 90).

Here, Lukács does not use demon in the common sense of the word; rather he means a fallen god whose “power is effective and alive, but it no longer penetrates the world” (86). In essence, these tormented men are touched by the vitality of past enchanted eras, and yet cannot find an understanding of, or resonance with, such vitality in the modern disenchanted world.

The modern West's relationship to nature, and its expression in the novel are also dominated by this exclusive humanism. Due to industrialization and urbanization, an entire novel can take place without ever leaving the exclusively human sphere. Everything can occur within buildings made by man and on streets paved by man, with the action of the plot occurring exclusively between human actors. This exclusively human sphere is another immanent frame of sorts, except instead of just blocking out the transcendent, it blocks out anything not created or dominated by man. This may sound extreme, but one need only read *The Catcher in the Rye* or *The Great Gatsby*, or any other number of the classic American novels of the past century to know that this trend has become strikingly dominant. As one moves backwards in time through American literature, this trend diminishes for the exact same reason that it has, for the most part, never occurred in the enchanted non-West: the *physical separation* from nature that is required before the *spiritual alienation* can occur, was not possible. If we go back even two hundred years into America's past, we can forget cars, electricity, indoor plumbing, and central air and heating. Homes for the most part were still rudimentary, cities were significantly smaller, and regardless of where you were, you were likely not far from what would today be considered "countryside". More than this, two hundred years ago there were still parts of America left unclaimed and, for the most part, unknown to anyone other than Native Americans. Westward Expansion and the wilderness of the frontier were still very much alive, and the last continental state (Arizona) would not be annexed until 1912. Even in a novel such as *Light in August* by William Faulkner, which is not at all focused on nature, the substantial presence of the land is felt throughout the novel simply because in 1932, when the book was written, not even the wealthiest citizen

could avoid the brutal heat of a Mississippi summer. The poorer citizens walked barefoot on dirt roads for miles, camped in the woods when they could not afford a motel, and more often than not, were raised on a farm surrounded by southern countryside.

Light in August is set in Faulkner's present day (1932) in the fictional town of Jefferson, Mississippi, modeled after Faulkner's own hometown. The plot interweaves the stories of Lena Grove, a young, pregnant, unmarried woman who has hitchhiked from Alabama to Jefferson in search of the father of her unborn child, and Joe Christmas, a man who passes as white but is internally tortured and consumed by his knowledge (although it is never definitively confirmed) that he has African-American heritage. Christmas lives in Jefferson and works at a planning mill as cover for his bootlegging operation. His partner in his illegal endeavors is the father of Lena's child, whom she knows as Lucas Burch, but who has since changed his name to Joe Brown after fleeing the ramifications of his relationship with Lena. Christmas and Brown live in a shack on the property of Joanna Burden, an older, unmarried white woman who is the only living member of a family of Northern abolitionists who moved to Jefferson during the Restoration and who are detested by the town. Christmas and Burden are involved in a longstanding, yet often perverse sexual relationship, which culminates in Christmas murdering Burden (although the circumstances of her death are never made entirely clear). Brown reveals to the town that Christmas is part African-American, and a manhunt ensues, resulting in Christmas being killed and castrated. Brown then leaves town, once again abandoning Lena and their child, but Faulkner suggests that Lena's future is not an unhappy one, in that she is now being cared for by Brown's coworker at the planning mill, the kind and generous Byron Bunch, who has fallen in love with Lena.

Set while both prohibition and Jim Crowe were very much alive and well in the South, the novel focuses heavily on issues of race, class and religion. However, my primary interest in the novel as it pertains to this paper, is in Lena's, for the most part unexamined, relationship to the land, and how that may pertain to the "calm and tranquil faith" that is frequently attributed to her.

The parents of the character Lena (who is raised in Alabama and then walks and hitchhikes in horse-drawn wagons all the way to Mississippi) are described as dying "in the same summer, in a log house of three rooms and a hall, without screens, in a room lighted by a bugswirled kerosene lamp, the naked floor worn smooth as old silver by naked feet" (Faulkner 401). These lines do not speak directly about nature qua nature, and yet they leave the reader with the distinct impression that this family (and probably many families like them) have no effective barrier between themselves and nature. They may have a house, but they are "without screens," they quite literally lack the physical barrier itself. They have a lamp, arguably a symbol of man's attempt to surpass the laws of nature, and yet it is "bugswirled"; they have a floor, but it is "naked" and likewise worn down by "naked feet," feet that do not wear shoes but are always in contact with the earth. The majority of the characters in *Light In August* live poor and rural lives as Lena does, and so they are raised from birth in intimate and unquestioned contact with the earth. Their "social imaginary", as Taylor would describe it, is shaped by this contact and so in some ways resembles the enchanted mindset of non-Western cultures likewise molded by their own "outsized landscape".

Both Taylor and Lukács argue that man's separation from nature and creation of an exclusive humanism fundamentally contribute to his disenchantment and division

within himself. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer expand upon this notion in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

with the denial of nature in human beings, not only the *telos* of the external mastery of nature but also the *telos* of one's own life becomes confused and opaque. At the moment when human beings cut themselves off from the consciousness of themselves as nature, all the purposes for which they keep themselves alive - social progress, the heightening of material and intellectual forces, indeed consciousness itself - become void, and the enthronement of the means as the end . . . is already detectable (42).

What Adorno and Horkheimer are suggesting is that our modern state of invulnerable rationality “included a sacrifice of the self, since it was paid for by a denial of nature in the human being for the sake of mastery over extrahuman nature and other human beings” (42). Ironically, such a state of affairs is profoundly *irrational* because in man's efforts to become master of himself and his environment, i.e. to no longer be at the mercy of the many spirits and forces of his world, he has shrunken and degraded the very self he wished to empower, by proudly claiming that he is separate and above all the vast riches of “nature” to which he once belonged. Adorno and Horkheimer refer to it as “self-mastery” and Taylor refers to it as “buffering,” but the meaning is the same. In Adorno and Horkheimer's words,

The human being's mastery of itself, on which the self is founded, practically always involves the annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained, because the substance which is mastered, suppressed and disintegrated by self-preservation is nothing other than the living entity, of which

the achievements of self-preservation can only be defined as functions – in other words, self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved” (43). Characters such as Lena have not deliberately avoided such a fate, but rather by existing in a time, place, and socioeconomic milieu where human and nature are unavoidably continuous, she has no option to cut herself “off from the consciousness of [herself] as nature”. If physical separation between nature and man is a prerequisite for the intense disenchantment witnessed in the modern West, then Lena and other similar characters’ unconscious closeness to nature precludes their experiencing the “chasm between self and world.”

Throughout *Light in August*, Lena is consistently identified by her “unflagging and tranquil faith” (Faulkner 403), somewhat unexpected characteristics in an unmarried, pregnant young woman walking by herself across two states to find the father of her child, who has abandoned her. When a woman Lena encounters on her journey attempts to remind her of the likelihood both that she will not be able to find the father of her child, and, that if she does, he will attempt to evade her again, she simply replies, “I reckon a family ought to all be together when a chap comes. Specially the first one. I reckon the Lord will see to that” (Faulkner 414). One might be tempted to see Lena’s faith instead as foolishness or naiveté, and she admittedly possesses some of those traits as well. That said, Lena does find the father of her child; thus, the plot bears out the logic of her faith. Although Lena must then endure the discovery that he is a bootlegger wrapped up in a murder investigation, and stand by as he immediately attempts to leave her and their child once again, she weathers each consecutive hardship with the same “unflagging and tranquil faith,” never giving any sign of sadness or despair. Ultimately,

Lena's faith is rewarded: while she does not end up with the father of her child, she ends up unharmed, with a healthy baby and a man infinitely kinder than the one she had intended to find. Lena's faith and calm in the face of her deeply undesirable circumstances is something beyond simple-mindedness. It is an implicit comfort with and trust in the workings of the world, and it is reminiscent of the state of being which Lukács suggests those ancient heroes and writers of epics possessed. He writes,

The heroes of youth [i.e., heroes of the ancient epics] are guided by the gods: whether what awaits them at the end of the road are the embers of annihilation or the joys of success, or both at once, they never walk alone, they are always led. Hence the deep certainty with which they proceed: they may weep and mourn, forsaken by everyone on a desert island, they may stumble to the very gates of hell in desperate blindness, yet an atmosphere of security always surrounds them; a god always plots the hero's paths and always walks ahead of him. (Lukács 86)

Such a state of affairs is almost strikingly similar to the attitude witnessed in Lena, who explicitly states, "I reckon the Lord will see to that." It would be unreasonable to suggest that such faith is due entirely to her more intimate relationship with nature. However, it is not unreasonable to believe that being raised in close contact with the earth contributed to her more implicit understanding and acceptance of its ways. It appears to be true for Lena, just as it was with those members of the ancient "integrated civilizations" (Lukács 29), that "the world is wide and yet it is like a home".

Lena's resonance with her environment stands in stark contrast to the dual fear of, and obsession with, nature that can be witnessed in *Housekeeping*. *Housekeeping* follows the lives of two sisters, Ruthie and Lucille (Ruthie is the narrator), throughout their

childhood and early adolescence. After the suicide of their single mother when the girls are barely more than toddlers, they move from Seattle to the small Northwestern town of “Fingerbone”, their mother’s childhood home. In Fingerbone they live in a house, built by their grandfather, which directly borders the lake in which their grandfather died in a freak train accident and their mother killed herself by driving her car off a cliff. They are raised consecutively by their grandmother, two aging great-aunts, and finally their mysterious and unstable aunt Sylvie, who, after sixteen years as transient, returns to the family home to care for the girls after learning of her mother’s (the girls’ grandmother) death in a newspaper. Sylvie and her “housekeeping” methods are extremely unusual; the girls often find her singing or talking to herself, standing silently in the dark for long periods of time, and sleeping in the backyard. She serves meals of “apples and jelly doughnuts and shoestring potatoes, a block of pre-sliced cheese, a bottle of milk, a bottle of catsup, and raisin bread in a stack” (87). Sylvie gradually allows the house to fall into disrepair, and the boundary between outside and inside to be almost completely degraded. The windowpanes break, the couches become sodden, and the house fills with leaves and stray cats. Ruthie and Lucille, already outsiders in the town due to their family’s strange and tragic history in the town, come under increasing scrutiny due to the unusual behavior of Sylvie. Both girls are initially simultaneously drawn to and frightened by Sylvie, but while Ruthie remains enticed by Sylvie’s closeness with the natural world, Lucille becomes increasingly frustrated with Sylvie’s ways and desperate to conform herself to the social norms of the town, eventually moving out of the house to live with her home economics teacher. As the novel progresses, the local authorities become increasingly interested in removing Ruthie and Lucille from Sylvie’s care, and the novel

ends with Sylvie taking Ruthie with her as they run away from Fingerbone and return to Sylvie's transient ways, attempting, but failing, to burn down the family home as they leave. Ruthie and Sylvie never again see Lucille.

Housekeeping is set in a truly "outsized landscape". Fingerbone is surrounded by vast mountains and dense forests, and borders a larger, deep lake. Raised by a revolving door of relatives, Ruthie and Lucille experience a lack of genuine parental attention. One consequence of this is that from a young age they spend a significant and perhaps inappropriate amount of time by themselves on or near the lake. They skate on the lake every day after school, going further out than anyone else and always the last to leave at night, "only we and the ice sweepers went out so far, and only we stayed" (Robinson 34). When they are older, they skip weeks of school and spend the days aimlessly by the lake, fishing, skipping stones, sitting (79, 95). One night they walk along the coast too, far too late, and are forced to camp on the shore in complete darkness (114). Sylvie is similarly drawn to the lake, and they often find her there, slowly walking, gazing out over the lake, sometimes coming "home with fish in her pockets" (136). This lake exerts a strong and constant influence on those who live in the town, which for Ruthie, Lucille and Sylvie, appears to be intensified and darkened by their family members' deaths within it. "It is true that one is always aware of the lake in Fingerbone, or the deeps of the lake, the lightless, airless waters below. When the ground is plowed in the spring . . . what exhales from the furrows but that same, sharp, watery smell" (Robinson 9). When the ice on the lake begins to thaw, the sound echoes throughout the town, "The clashes and groans from the lake continued unabated, dreadful at night, and the sound of the night wind in the mountains was like one long indrawn breath" (65). Earlier, Ruthie, describes these

“groans” as the “giant miseries of the lake” (64). The weather in Fingerbone is also extreme, and persistent in reminding the townspeople of its dominance throughout every season. In the winter, “Some houses in Fingerbone simply fell from the weight of snow on their roofs” (33). In the spring, as the rain came and the snow thawed, “the houses and hutches and barns and sheds of Fingerbone were like so many spilled and foundered arks. There were chickens roosting in the telephone poles and dogs swimming by in the streets” (61). In many of the descriptions of the environment surrounding Fingerbone, the impression of the lake (as well as the forest) as a living, breathing entity is palpable. Such a state of affairs feels decidedly enchanted, and given the outsized nature of the landscape and its consistent contact with the novel’s characters, one might expect them to have developed a familiarity and comfortability with the land not unlike Lena’s. However, the characters differ significantly in the social framework that surrounds them. The characters of *Housekeeping*, unlike Lena, live within a physical structure and social milieu that prohibit them from experiencing the same unquestioned coexistence with nature.

Lena exists within a culture where direct contact with and subjugation to, the forces of nature is completely expected and accepted. Ruthie and Lucille, on the other hand, live in a society that posits nature as an entity entirely separate from “civilized” culture as a force to be avoided and resisted, and endured only when necessary. Therefore, the intimate relationship with nature that would be expected to increase one’s trust and understanding of their place in the world, as it does for Lena, is laced with feeling of unease and guilt for Ruthie and Lucille because it directly conflicts with the social expectations of their community. Furthermore, while Lena has an implicit trust in

the protection of God that allows her world to be imbued with a sense of divine guidance, none of Ruthie and Lucille's guardians provide them with a positive framework of belief in any form of transcendence. The result is that the girls, especially Ruthie, develop a reverence for nature, but a reverence that is entangled with fear of its profound otherness. They are also influenced by what can only be described as the vague and often frightening spirituality of Sylvie. This association of nature with a freaky spirituality contributes to the impression that nature may indeed be suffused with power and meaning, but an alien and ungraspable power and meaning. This is a far cry from the power and meaning of the nature with which humans share a warm continuity of soul, as described by Lukács. The power of nature in *Housekeeping* is mysterious and alluring, but it is also dangerous; and it must be surrendered to, rather than embraced.

Although the landscape surrounding Fingerbone is arguably much more "outsized" than that of *Light in August*, Lena is raised in a bare, thoroughly permeable log cabin in the remote countryside, whereas Ruthie and Lucille spend their early years in an apartment in Seattle and are then raised in a large house with a "piano, and the scrolled couch, and the bookcases full of almanacs and Kipling and Defoe" (Robinson 158). While the description of Lena's home, with its "bugswirled kerosene lamp", "bare floor" and screenless window, speak to a natural continuity with the land, everything about the description of Ruthie and Lucille's home speaks of the advancements of human cultures that are often argued to have elevated humanity *above* nature: the piano, the elegant furniture. It is particularly telling that their bookcases were full of "Kipling and Defoe". As mentioned earlier, Defoe and his *Robinson Crusoe* can be seen as emblematic of the disenchanted form of the volatilized novel. Kipling is often criticized for his support of

colonial imperialism, which as an institution is itself built upon a deeply disenchanted hierarchy of different human races and other living beings, as well as the willing subjugation and extraction of natural resources. Therefore, even the books the girls are exposed to suggest that even as they are surrounded by an outsized landscape, they are being indoctrinated into a disenchanted mindset. Ruthie goes on to describe how their grandmother decorated the arms of the couches with large, starched doilies; they had a fireplace in the living room, a stove in the kitchen, and three separate bedrooms. They live in a remote part of the country, but unlike Lena they live in the center of town, with a train that runs right through it. Lena walks barefoot; Ruthie and Lucille walk in “whited shoes” (24) or “blue velveteen ballet slippers” (93). While most of the homes in Fingerbone flood thoroughly every spring, their grandfather “had the good judgment to set it on a hill, so while others were pushing drowned mattresses out of second-story windows, we simply spooled up our living-room rug and propped it on the porch steps” (74), a protection that further insulates them from the forces of nature. This physical separation from nature in and of itself establishes “nature” as “other” from the developed human society and structure within which the girls are raised.

It is unlikely, however, that this physical separation alone is responsible for the strange combination of attraction to and repulsion from nature that is evident in the main characters of *Housekeeping*. Ruthie reports that “she went to the woods for the woods’ own sake” (Robinson 99), and that they “always stayed in the woods until it was evening” (98). Yet on the very same page, she also admits that “The woods themselves disturbed us . . . the deep woods are as dark and stiff and as full of their own odors as the parlor of an old house. We would walk among those great legs, hearing the enthralled

and incessant murmurings far above our heads, like children at a funeral” (98). The girls, especially Ruthie, are clearly drawn to the wilderness; and yet, their awe is unmistakably tinged with fear, and the greatness of the woods is also merged with darkness. Over the course of the novel, the degree of physical separation from nature that the girls experience decreases significantly, but it does not correspond to an alleviation of the tension, the push and pull between fear and fascination, that the girls experience in relation to the land—the push toward and pull from that which is irreducibly Other.

Within a few years of Sylvie coming to take care of Ruthie and Lucille, the once pristine house to which their grandmother had tended “had crickets in the pantry, squirrels in the eaves, sparrows in the attic” (Robinson 99), leaves gathered in all the corners (84), and several of its windows broken, with little pieces of dead birds strewn about from the thirteen or fourteen cats living in the house (181). However, as this transformation occurs under Sylvie’s negligent guardianship, the characters’ relationships to nature only become more strained and complicated. The deterioration of their home pushes Lucille to move out and seek a more traditional home and more socially accepted, modern separation from nature. It also coincides closely with the end of her frequent trips to the lake with Ruthie. Ruthie, by contrast, is not driven to shun nature; if anything her attraction to nature grows stronger. But her connection is fraught: always full of awe, but also full of fear and something close to sadness as well.

Sylvie attitude toward nature remains the most unchanged throughout the novel, but it is her very tendency to dissolve the barriers between human society and nature that significantly contributes to the destabilization and eventual dissolution of the small family. Why does this happen? If Lukács and Taylor and Latour and Adorno and

Horkheimer all suggest that a division between human and what has been labeled as “nature” significantly contributes to the modern man’s difficulty in finding “fullness” and resonance with his world, then why then do the aspects of these characters’ lives that bring them closer to nature also create tension and unhappiness? The answer is that the solution of one problem causes another: dissolving the boundary between human and nature breaks the dominant social codes established by the people of Fingerbone. The characters are not allowed to embrace any potential feelings of resonance with the land because society portrays such a connection as abnormal; this creates a mindset where Ruthie and Lucille are both fascinated with and yet fearful and repulsed by their own impulses to embrace the natural. It also creates a self-consciousness of impulse, which completely eliminates the possibility of the unquestioned resonance Lena experiences with her environment.

Sylvie’s formerly transient lifestyle alone makes the townspeople of Fingerbone deeply uncomfortable, but when Sylvie and Ruthie spend increasing amounts of time outdoors and on the lake, the townspeople’s discomfort becomes acute. In *Light in August*, the living conditions of Lena and her family correspond to what people expect of rural southern farmers in the 1930s; no one is alarmed by her meager house or bare feet. However, Ruthie, Lucille, and Sylvie live three decades after Lena. They are a well-read family of modest means, a family that lives near the center of town, and owns its large house outright. They are expected to wear shoes and to dress properly, to visit with neighborhood women and to go to church on Sunday. Ruthie and Lucille are not supposed to sit by the lake all day, catching, gutting, and roasting small fish (Robinson 113), and they are certainly not supposed to camp out overnight on the shore, miles from

town (114). Sylvie is not supposed to take her quilt and sleep under the sky, and she is not supposed to spend all night with Ruthie in a rowboat on the Lake. Of course, there are issues of safety here, and Ruthie and Lucille certainly lack appropriate parental care. However, the reason that the townspeople of Fingerbone stop politely ignoring the family and move to separate legally the girls from their guardian Sylvie is far more nuanced than a simple concern for the girls' safety. Ruthie describes the good Christian ladies who begin to visit their home, as follows:

They were obliged to come by their notions of piety and good breeding, and by a desire, a determination, to keep me, so to speak, safely within doors . . . they had reason to feel that my social graces were eroding away, and that soon I would feel ill at ease in a cleanly house with glass in its windows – I would be lost to ordinary society. I would be a ghost, and their food would not answer to my hunger, and my hands could pass through their down quilts . . . and never feel them or find comfort in them. Like a soul released, I would find here only the images and simulacra of the things needed to sustain me. (183)

They attempt to bring Ruthie back within the buffered realm of their exclusive humanism because they fear that her dissolution of the boundary between society and nature threatens to reveal the insubstantiality of those things which they hold as foundations of their lives: clean and strong houses, “down quilts”, “social graces”, etc.

Ironically—or perhaps, dialectically—the very fact that the “outsized landscape” of Fingerbone encourages such a dissolution of the barrier between society and nature only strengthens the inhabitants' resolve to maintain said barrier.

There was not a soul there but knew how shallow-rooted the whole town was. It flooded yearly, and had burned down once. Often enough the lumber mill shut down, or burned down. So a diaspora threatened always. And there is no living creature, though the whims of eons had . . . diminished it to a pinpoint and given it a taste for mud . . . but that creature will live on if it can. So certainly Fingerbone . . . would value itself too and live on if and as it could. So every wanderer whose presence suggested it might be as well to drift . . . was met with something that seemed at first site a moral reaction, since morality is a check upon the strongest temptations (Robinson 178).

In the presence of such powerful natural forces, the urge to return to natural and “wandering” ways is the “strongest temptation,” and so the people of Fingerbone fiercely protect their pillars of established, developed society because a division between “human” and “nature” is part of the very foundation of how disenchanted societies understand themselves as “human.” They do not consider that such staunch separation of human and nature could be a detrimental rather than defining aspect of humanity; and so they fear the ways of those, such as Ruthie and Sylvie, who question the way disenchanted society understands itself.

Lucille, Sylvie, and Ruthie respond in different ways to the simultaneous push and pull of human society and the natural world. Lucille is the only one of the three who wholly embraces the expectations of the townspeople and firmly rejects the “deviant” closeness with nature that her aunt displays. When they are younger, Lucille and Ruthie spend a similar amount of time in the woods and on the shore of the lake. However, as they get older, Lucille no longer goes to the woods for pleasure, but rather to “escape

observation”. As Ruthie explains, “I went to the woods for the woods’ own sake, while, increasingly, Lucille seemed to be enduring a banishment there” (Robinson 99). As the state of the house continues to decay, and the behavior of Ruthie and Sylvie grows increasingly socially unacceptable, it becomes clear that “Lucille’s loyalties were with the other world” (95). By “other world”, Ruthie means the dominant social culture, which she herself experiences as entirely foreign. Unable to bear the pressure of social expectations and the quiet yet constant disapproval of the town, Lucille wholeheartedly embraces those expectations and actively tries to meet them:

She brushed her hair a hundred strokes . . . She groomed her nails. This was all in preparation for school, since Lucille was now determined to make something of herself. And with what rigor, what hard purpose, she threw herself down in the grass with *Ivanhoe* and *The Light That Failed* and anything else she took to be improving . . . if I said ‘When you’re tired of that let’s go to the lake,’ she replied, ‘Go away, Ruthie’ (132).

Sadly, while Lucille’s choice alleviates the societal pressure, it perpetuates the division between human and nature, and so will likely perpetuate in Lucille the lack of “fullness” and resonance that plagues disenchanted humanity.

In stark contrast to Lucille’s choices, Sylvie cares not a whit about the disapproval of the townspeople, and, in fact, seems no longer to notice it. Living as a transient for sixteen years, sleeping under the sky with no barriers between herself and her environment, she may have succeeded in coming into closer relation to nature; however, the process by which she was able to deafen herself to the protests of society also made her incapable of being a completely functional member of human society. As Ruthie

explains, “she could forget I was in the room. She could speak to herself, or to someone in her thoughts, with pleasure and animation, even while I sat beside her” (Robinson 195). Once again, such a maladaptive state of affairs occurs because Sylvie lives within an actively disenchanted culture that appears to leave no option other than an extreme commitment to one or the other “side.” In this way, even though Sylvie has diminished the chasm between human and nature, she has not succeeded in mending the “chasm between self and world”; this is because in bringing herself closer to nature she has deepened the chasm between herself and other humans. So, although she no longer feels its pressure, society’s expectations have denied her resonance with her holistic world, just as they have for Lucille.

For the majority of the novel, Ruthie is caught between the opposing choices of Lucille and Sylvie. In “Transcendent Women: Uses of the Mystical in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*,” Sonia Gernes writes that Ruthie, “is enticed by Sylvie’s world of transience, ephemeral beauty, and quasi-mystical quality that defies the body’s demands and limits, but she still sees this world as threatening to the family unit that the three comprise and as foreign and strange” (155). However, despite these conflicting feelings, it is often made clear that Ruthie finds more potential for fulfillment in Sylvie’s ways than she does in Lucille’s:

It seemed to me then that Lucille would busy herself forever, nudging, pushing, coaxing, as if she could supply the will I lacked, to pull myself into some seemly shape and slip across the wide frontiers into that other world, where it seemed to me then I could never wish to go. For it seemed to me that nothing I had lost, or

might lose, could be found there, or, to put it another way, it seemed that something I had lost might be found in Sylvie's house (123).

Ruthie recognizes the hollowness of life in the exclusively human sphere, but she cannot bring herself to escape from the dichotomy in which life is either "Lucille's way" or "Sylvie's way." More than this, Ruthie conflates resonance with nature and complete dissolution into nature. She dreams not of a marriage of human and nature, but rather for the human to be absorbed by the natural. Ruthie clearly recognizes something transcendent in nature, but her intimacy with it seems more likely to destroy her than to fulfill her. When she and Lucille spend the night on the banks of the lake, she "simply let the darkness in the sky become coextensive with the darkness in my skull and bowels and bones" (116). On her walk home she speaks of knowing "each particular tree, and its season, and its shadow" and of watching two dead apple trees in spring stand

expectantly, their limbs almost to the ground, miming their perished fruitfulness.

Every winter the orchard is flooded with snow, and every spring the waters are parted, death is undone and every Lazarus rises, except these two . . . but if ever a leaf does appear, it should be no great wonder . . . it seemed to me that what perished need not also be lost. (124)

Clearly Ruthie experiences the life that courses through the natural world, and she experiences herself as intimately connected, even continuous with, this natural world. And yet, it also seems as if she lacks any framework through which to understand this continuity in a positive, life-affirming light. Her family members have died in the lake, and Sylvie has lost her self to nature as well. Whenever Ruthie imagines herself in most intimate union with nature, it is also always a process of losing herself. When Sylvie

rows them into the middle of the lake at night, Ruthie imagines them being pulled into a vortex: “we would be drawn down into the darker world, where other sounds would pour into our ears until we seemed to find songs in them . . . and the taste of water would invade our bowels and unstring our bones, and we would know the customs of the place as if there were no others” (150), and she imagines the spirits of the woods “come unhouse me of this flesh . . . It was no shelter now, it only kept me here alone . . . If I could see my mother, it would not have to be her eyes, her hair . . . The lake had taken that I knew” (159). Ruthie comes so very close to a truly enchanted perspective, in that she allows herself to be entirely unbuffered. However, ultimately Ruthie has not found a way to mend the chasm between self and world; rather, she has just surrendered her self entirely to the world, and in the end, when she joins Sylvie in her transient life, she is no epic hero guided by the warmth of the world, she is a shell of a person who has lost all ability to connect to the human world. At the end of the novel Ruthie asks herself, “When did I become so unlike other people?” (214). Ruthie has jumped to the other side of the chasm, but the chasm remains.

The paradox in which Ruthie, Lucille, and Sylvie find themselves mirrors Lukacs’ tragic man banging against the glass, the “bees against a window, incapable of breaking through, incapable of understanding that the way is barred.” All three characters seek an alleviation of their inner conflict; they seek resonance with their world, with themselves, and with their fellow humans. But regardless of how they seek this resonance they are confronted with the painful reality that in a disenchanted world, the two spheres that must be mended together appear mutually exclusive, and that to fully enter one inevitably casts off the other.

Housekeeping is somewhat of an anomaly in that it presents a convincing illusion of having mended Lukàcs' "chasm between self and world," therefore having escaped his paradox of the novel. In truth, it becomes clear that Ruthie, Lucille and Sylvia are all far away from the true integration of soul and world that the ancient epic hero experiences. However, the illusion is convincing. This is because, unlike the true Lukàcsian hero, who, possessed by the demonic, beats ceaselessly "against the window", Sylvie, Ruthie and Lucille all appear to have some degree of choice, or, at the very least, they appear to resolve themselves to their respective fates with little to no "beating in vain" against the glass. None of the characters in housekeeping have truly "fallen prey to the demon," nor are they truly "overreaching" themselves; they seem not to feel all that acutely the trap of disenchantment and the immanent frame, i.e. the glass wall that has been erected in front of them.

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger, however, embodies Lukàcs' conception of the novel and its protagonist possessed by the demon, in every possible way. Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of *Catcher*, is a teenage boy who has grown up in New York City in the 1950s, in a wealthy, non-religious family of European descent, and has just been kicked out of the last of many elite boarding schools for failing every class other than English. After his expulsion, Holden returns home to the City early for break and has two days and two nights to pass before his parents expect home. These two days make up the entirety of the novel, but also include several flashbacks, which reveal that Holden's beloved younger brother Allie died of cancer several years earlier. Holden spends these two days wandering throughout the City in a haze of cigarettes, alcohol and depression, stopping at various bars and nightclubs, and calling on various old

acquaintances, most of whom he admits to the reader ahead of time that he is not very fond of. In one scene he even call for a prostitute, only to ask her once she arrives if they can just talk instead. On the second night, Holden stays at the apartment of a prior teacher, Mr. Antolini; one of the only adults in the novel of whom Holden speaks in a positive light. However, when Holden awakes in the middle of the night to Mr. Antolini stroking his head, he jumps to conclusions and quickly leaves, spiraling further into the mental and physical decline that has been developing throughout the novel. The two days end with Holden crying tears of happiness while watching his younger sister Phoebe, of whom he speaks of with the utmost respect, riding a merry-go-round. However, the very ending of the novel jumps forward several months, with Holden speaking to the reader from what we believe to be the hospital or rehab center in which he is recovery from an episode that is only vaguely referred to.

Unlike the characters in *Housekeeping*, who seem capable of reconciling themselves to their buffered forms of existence, Holden is consumed by his distress that the interactions people have with one another, and the lives they choose for themselves, are profoundly “phony”, to use his choice word--or rather, lacking any meaningful connection to one another or the world in which they live. In his piece “Alienation, Materialism, and Religion in J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*,” Robert C. Evans writes,

Holden seems fundamentally frustrated and unhappy with his life and most of the people around him . . . Very few characters in Salinger’s book appear to enjoy satisfying and purposeful existences; instead, they are living lives that appear essentially self-centered, calculating, and insincere (41).

Evans goes on to suggest that while Holden “looks on the world with premature cynicism and jaded contempt . . . at some level he also hungers for a deeper, richer, more fulfilling existence” (42). *Catcher* is defined both by Holden’s intense desire to find a more genuine, unbuffered existence, and by his complete lack of understanding for how he must go about doing so, as well as by his struggle to find others in the world who share his muddled quest. Holden has no cultural or familial background of belief in any form of transcendence whatsoever to which he can turn, and he lives in a setting almost completely devoid of natural surroundings. He has nothing upon which to base a search for greater meaning, only a profound feeling of its absence. He tells the reader that “his parents are different religions, and all the children in our family are atheists” (Salinger 131). During his first night back in the city after boarding school, when Holden is feeling “so depressed, you can’t imagine,” he says to the reader, “I felt like praying or something, when I was in bed, but I couldn’t do it. I can’t always pray when I feel like it” (130). The scene is poignant and yet brutal because Holden’s desire for the guidance and support of a framework of belief is palpable; and yet, never having been introduced to religion in a genuine way, or any other form of transcendent belief, he feels himself severed from it, unable to reach it. The only form of unbuffered existence that Holden witnesses is childhood, and he essentially worships it. The only people in the novel he truly loves and respects are children, and he desperately wishes that he could prevent all children from growing up. However, he never recognizes that childhood is merely one example of an unbuffered state because he has seen it nowhere else in his life, with the exception of a few moments with a close female friend, which he likewise treasures.

Holden and Salinger, respectively, illustrate Lukàcs' suggested irony of the novelist and his hero: "this irony, is directed both at his [the novelist's] heroes, who, in their poetically necessary youthfulness, are destroyed by trying to turn his faith into reality, and against his own wisdom, which has been forced to see the uselessness of the struggle and the final victory of the reality (Lukàcs 85). Holden is destroyed by trying to turn Salinger's faith into a reality in that throughout the novel Holden continues to make brash and misguided attempts at establishing more meaningful and unbuffered connections with those around him, people who are for the most part completely unreceptive to his efforts. As these failed and/or unreciprocated attempts accumulate, Holden spirals into a place of depression and anxiety until he ends the novel speaking to the reader from the hospital or sanitarium in which he is recovering. *Catcher's* plot and Holden's disintegration support Lukàcs' claim that "This vain search and then the resignation with which it is abandoned make the circle that completes the form [of the novel]" (85). Lukàcs' theory of the novel is built on the assumption that the search for an existence not dominated by the chasm between self and world is necessarily "vain," that an existence more like that of ancient "integrated civilizations," in which profound resonance is felt between the self and all other aspects of world, is impossible to achieve. Novels such as *Catcher* profoundly support such an assumption. When the novel ends, Salinger offers the reader only the barest shred of hope for Holden's future, with Holden telling the reader that he "thinks" he will apply himself in school next year, although he swears "it's a stupid question" (Salinger 276). He also confesses that he wishes he had not told his story to so many people because now he misses all the characters he spoke about, even the pimp who beat him up; this nostalgic sentiment could potentially be

considered touching, however, to “miss” characters with whom he never experienced any kind of positive or supportive relationship could also be seen as evidence of Holden’s extreme need for human connection.

J.D. Salinger himself admitted that *Catcher* was “sort of” autobiographical, explaining, “My boyhood was very much the same as that of the boy in the book . . . [I]t was a great relief telling people about it” (Crawford 4). Living entrenched within the same disenchanted world he crafts for Holden, Salinger speaks compassionately of the trap in which they find themselves. However, he offers no genuine suggestion for how they might escape it because, just like Holden, he lacks the framework of belief to conceive of such a solution, and he has likely never, or very rarely, witnessed enchantment, or a profound state of unbufferedness, in his own lived experience. In “Reviewers, Critics and *The Catcher in the Rye*,” Richard and Carol Ohmann suggest that *Catcher*

is among other things a serious critical mimesis of bourgeois life in the eastern United states, ca. 1950 – of snobbery, privilege, class injury, culture as a badge of superiority . . . warped social feeling, competitiveness, stunted human possibility, the list could go on . . . in short, the esthetic force of the novel is quite precisely located in its rendering a contradiction of a particular [i.e., late capitalist] society, as expressed through an adolescent sensibility that feels, though it cannot comprehend, this contradiction (35).

The Ohmanns capture the limitation of *Catcher* with the phrase “expressed through an adolescent sensibility that feels, *though it cannot comprehend*, this contradiction.”

Salinger powerfully communicates the *feeling* of the disenchanted division between the

human soul and the world, i.e. “this contradiction,” but he does not understand its basis or its resolution; and so he is limited in the ways both his novel and his hero are capable of addressing it.

Chapter Two – Ceremonial Vision

This chapter examines the ways in which modern American novels are typically limited in their scope because they are the products of modern American novelist who themselves are deeply enmeshed in a buffered and disenchanted worldview. They often have very little, if any, exposure to unbuffered states, and therefore struggle to present

anything beyond a disenchanted world to their readers. I invoke the novel *Ceremony* as an example of a modern American novel that is not burdened by the same restrictions because its author, Leslie Marmon Silko, has grown up within one of the few remaining pockets of enchantment within America (in this case the Laguna Pueblo Indian reservation in New Mexico). I utilize the testimonio *Black Elk Speaks* to suggest the extremely rapid nature of the forced colonial disenchantment of native populations and argue that this has enabled many native authors to maintain a unique perspective on the disenchanted state of America. I then examine the plot of *Ceremony* to show that the novel not only acts as microcosm for the larger process of disenchantment outlined by Taylor, but that it goes beyond Taylor to suggest the way in which the modern West may begin to return to a more enchanted and integrated existence.

Modern American novels such as *Housekeeping* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, do a very good job of illustrating our modern disenchanted condition with often poignant beauty. However, they struggle to identify the cause of this “unbridgeable chasm between self and world,” this lack of “fullness” that they unwittingly describe, and they often fail to offer hope or solutions for how we may bridge the chasm and once again bring ourselves into union with one another and with our world. Taylor, as mentioned before, does identify what he believes to be the cause: over many centuries, and due to myriad causes such as religious reform and myopic scientific advancement, we in the West have more or less banished divine meaning and influence from the Earthly sphere, and thereby removed our means of understanding our connections to, and place within, our world. More than that, in past enchanted eras, a shared belief in a transcendent power (or powers) that flowed through all of existence, created a framework of belief that was

common to the entire community and enabled social understanding between human members of society as well. In addition, on a more philosophical note, when meaning is entirely relegated to the human mind, the extreme conclusion is that not even the meaning or reality of other humans external to our own mind can be fully trusted or appreciated. Therefore, the process by which we have become ostracized from the Earth, is the very same by which we have become ostracized from one another.

Our estrangement from the Earth, as stated before, is blatant both in the literature and physical environment of the modern West. Our estrangement from one another, on the other hand, is much less tangible; and so it may seem that Taylor is making his greatest assumptions in this dimension. However, there are many trends in modern Western society that point to the validity of Taylor's claim about interpersonal estrangement. For example, in 1952, fifty percent of Americans believed America was more moral than it had been in the past. By 1998, Americans believed by a margin of three to one that Americans were less honest and moral than they used to be (Putnam 139). Such a widespread perception of diminished morality in society necessarily entails mutual estrangement among members of society, given that such a perception is inherently built upon many individuals' beliefs that they cannot trust those around them. Over the course of the last seventeen years the American suicide rate rose by 25 percent,² since 2013 the number of people diagnosed with major depression rose by 33 percent,³ and in the past 311 days alone, there have been 307 mass shootings in the United States,⁴

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44416727>

³ <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/major-depression-rise-among-everyone-new-data-shows-n873146>

⁴ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/11/08/thousand-oaks-california-bar-shooting-307th-mass-shooting/1928574002/>

one of the countries with the highest standard of living in the world. There are of course a multitude of reason for each of these facts, but it is, perhaps, not unreasonable to consider that they may be related to the profound buffering and resulting personal isolation and lack of “fullness” that Taylor believes has come to define the modern West.

The modern American novel presents these consequences to us in literary form. In *Housekeeping*, Ruthie and Lucille’s mother, quiet and withdrawn for the entirety of their childhood, takes her own life and leaves them orphaned. Robinson offers no obvious motives for this act, but rather shows us multiple scenes of the mother’s seeming inability to connect to her friends and neighbors, and to her own daughters. When Lucille asks Sylvie whether she still has friends in Fingerbone, Sylvie reveals her and her sisters’ isolated position in the town even when they were children, “Well, the fact is, I never did have many friends here. We kept to ourselves. We knew who everyone *was*, that’s all” (Robinson 57). Many years later, Ruthie states that she feels no drive to conform to social society. She states, as quoted above, “it seemed to me that nothing I had lost, or might lose, could be found there, or, to put it another way, it seemed that something I had lost might be found in Sylvie’s house (123). This statement displays the complete lack of resonance Ruthie must feel toward her community since she believes that it cannot repair any of the absence she feels. At first, her belief that “something I had lost might be found in Sylvie’s house” offers hope that adopting Sylvie’s total rejection of social norms and avid embrace of the outdoors may heal Ruthie’s buffered self. However, this hope is shown to be misplaced when adopting Sylvie’s nomadic lifestyle permanently separates Ruthie from her sister and leaves her constantly moving from town to town, never forming meaningful relationships with anyone. So the question remains, if

modern American literature is capable of displaying to the reader the problem, but not the cause or the solution, where then is one to turn for the answer?

Native American literature offers an illuminating comparison to the other American novels studied here. Although the same feelings of anomie, confusion and sadness, the same lack of “fullness” are present in Native American literature, the process of disenchantment among Native Americans began much more recently, occurred much more abruptly, and among some Native Americans, has in fact never occurred at all. For many, their social imaginary is still built upon an enchanted metaphysics and ethics that are grounded in a communal understanding of the self and a foundational appreciation for our origin within, and continuity with, the natural Earth. Because of this, some Native American novels are able not only to present protagonists embroiled in the challenges of modernity, but also to identify the roots of these challenges and offer ways for the protagonist, and therefore potentially the reader, to be healed. However, while the strength and immediacy of native culture has the potential to unveil the yoke of disenchantment, the violence and force with which such disenchantment was thrust upon native people also has the potential to blind them with a despair and confusion more profound than their white counterparts. Such despair is reflected in the disproportionately high suicide and substance abuse rates among native populations; in American literature, these “blinded” characters often appear as counterpoints to the protagonists. However, in some cases, it is from this place of “blindness” that the protagonist himself/herself evolves.

Black Elk Speaks, the testimonio of the Oglala Lakota holy man and healer Black Elk, as told through the poet John Neihardt, makes brutally vivid how startling small the

time frame was in which Black Elk and other natives' lives were violently shifted from the traditional lifestyles that had been practiced in their ancestral lands for millennia, to a world upended by the white man, who removed from their sacred lands and forcibly pushed them into the disenchanted structures of the Euro-American. Black Elk was born in 1863, just over 150 years ago. When he recounts the earliest part of his life, he states, "I had never seen a Wasichu then, and did not know what one looked like" (Neihardt 6). He elaborates,

there were winters and summers, and they were good; for the Wasichus had made their iron road [railroad] along the Platte and travelled there. This had cut the bison herd in two, but those that stayed in our country with us were more than could be counted, and we wandered without trouble in our land. (Neihardt 13)

Black Elk's description of this era reveals that while the presence of the Wasichus was certainly beginning to be felt, it was not yet disrupting the day-to-day lives of his people, and they were able to continue living in the manner they always had. However, by the time Black Elk is eighteen, after little more than a decade had passed, the entirety of Black Elk's tribe, and all the other Plains tribes with which he was familiar, had been stripped of their land and forced onto reservations:

The soldier chief told us that we could not be in that country because we had sold it and it was not ours any more. We had not sold it; but the soldiers took all the rest of our horses from us and what guns we had and . . . carried us down the Yellowstone and the Missouri to Fort Yates. There they unloaded us, and it was one of the new reservations they had made for the Lakota. (Neihardt 110)

It is almost incomprehensible how rapidly such a massive change is imposed upon Black Elk and his people, and it must be acknowledged that this shift is much more than a physical move, but rather at its core is a forced transformation from an enchanted to a disenchanted lifeway. Not only are Black Elk and his people removed from the land, but they are removed from ancestral *sacred* lands that are believed to be the foundation of the people. They do not simply have guns and horses taken away from them, but rather they lose their means of following and hunting buffalo, a creature that is part of the core of their religious practice. They are forced to give up communal living practices, thereby weakening their means for living unbuffered from those in their community. Black Elk summarizes both the enchanted mindset of his people, and the effect of the Wasichu invasion when he states,

Once we were happy in our own country and we were seldom hungry, for then the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds lived together like relatives, and there was plenty for them and for us. But the Wasichus came, and they have made little islands for us and other little islands for the four-legged, and always these islands are becoming smaller, for around them surges the gnawing flood of the Wasichu; and it is dirty with lies and greed (Neihardt 6).

Black Elk's phrase "for then the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds lived together like relatives" is perhaps the simplest and most eloquent way to describe the condition of connectivity and continuity with nature that is a pillar of the enchanted mindset. Even his names for humans and animals express this continuity. "Human" and "animal" are two distinct categories, whereas "two-leggeds" and "four-leggeds" suggests a single group, of which these two examples simply differ in their number of legs. Likewise, his

description of the little islands both for the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds is a powerful visual representation of Taylor's concept of "buffering".

These changes forced upon Black Elk, his people, and Native Americans across the United States, replicate the process of disenchantment that occurred in Europe, not by removing God from the earth, but rather by forcibly removing the people from their means of connecting to their Earth and their gods, which are in fact, one and the same. The extremely condensed nature of this process compared to its multi-century counterpart in Europe means that the forced disenchantment of native populations serves as a sort of concentrated microcosm for understanding the larger process of disenchantment that has progressed over the past five centuries. Because the larger process of disenchantment occurred gradually over a long period of time, most of the people affected by the process were/are completely unaware of what has occurred, even if they may feel its consequences. This is not so for many of the Native Americans upon whom this rapid disenchantment was violently imposed, and for whom the cultural memory of a truly enchanted world is still fresh, and in many cases still active. This is not to suggest, however, that the process is for them easy to reverse, but simply that Native American authors are often more capable of recognizing the process of disenchantment (even if they do not refer to it in such terms) and understanding what must be done to repair the damage.

Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko, is a powerful example of a Native American author (Silko belongs to the Laguna Pueblo tribe) drawing on her/his own enchanted framework of belief, while working through the traditionally *disenchanted* form of the novel. Other novels in this tradition include *Winter in the Blood* (1974) by James Welch

and *House Made of Dawn* by N. Scott Momaday. These authors do so in order to craft a story that powerfully posits the bridging of the “chasm between self and world” while remaining approachable to a broad readership, including those readers who may be thoroughly steeped in a disenchanted mentality. She accomplishes this monumental feat by gradually transforming her story from one that closely resembles Lukàcs’ concept of the novel, to one that begins to resemble his image of the epic created by ancient “integrated civilizations.” In doing so, Silko gently guides the disenchanted and uninitiated reader into a state of greater openness to enchanted elements that would typically trigger disbelief or discomfort; thus does Silko essentially begin to build for the mainstream reader the framework of belief that they presumably lack. Willing readers can witness in Silko’s writing the evidence of the division they may themselves experience, but they can see, too, that the division is not intractable; the familiar and unified world of the epic has not disappeared forever from the world; rather it has only been hidden to our eyes behind the veil of disenchantment; the chasm *can* be mended. Silko is the liminal novelist that Lukàcs did not foresee. In straddling the line of enchantment/disenchantment, Silko possesses a unique perspective, in that both worldviews are comprehensible and intimate to her. She can therefore create a story, a novel, that neither surrenders to Lukàcs’ hopelessly inevitable, Godless paradox, nor risks being so blatantly enchanted as to alienate a disenchanted readership.

Ceremony, set on the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico, tells the story of Tayo, a young World War II veteran of mixed ancestry who has recently returned home to the reservation. Once home, he struggles for months with physical and emotional trauma in the wake of the war, and is only healed through a profound and eternal

“ceremony” that bring him back into recognition of the inalienable unity of man with the earth and with his fellow man. Tayo is the son of an absent white or Mexican father and a Laguna mother, who, infamous for her drinking and relationships with non-Indian men, dies when Tayo is young and leaves him to be raised by his Aunt Thelma (known as “Auntie”), her husband Robert, and Tayo’s Uncle Josiah. Tayo and Auntie’s and Robert’s son Rocky are the same age. Auntie views Tayo as the product of his mother’s indiscretions and, thus, a constant source of shame for the family; as such, she does all she can to sabotage the relationship between Tayo and Rocky. Despite her best efforts, however, they grow up as best friends and brothers.

Taylor speaks of one of the dominant qualities of the modern disenchanted West as the state of being “cross-pressured” (Taylor 303), or the experience of multiple opposing worldviews simultaneously exerting their pressure on one’s belief structure. Tayo benefits from growing up exposed to a profoundly enchanted metaphysics and ethics, and therefore has a framework by which, potentially, to access truly enchanted belief. However, at the same time, he is profoundly cross-pressured through the influence of institutions (such as the government-run Indian school Tayo attends) whose deliberate aim is to delegitimize and undermine enchanted native belief systems, as well as the broader white, dominant culture that derides such beliefs as foolish and superstitious. For example, at one point Tayo remembers a specific lesson in his science class:

when the teacher brought in a tubful of dead frogs . . . and the Navajos all left the room . . . The Jemez girl raised her hand and said the people always told the kids not to kill frogs, because the frogs would get angry and send so much rain there

would be floods. The science teacher laughed loudly . . . ‘Look at these frogs,’ he said pointing at the discolored rubbery bodies and clouded eyes. ‘Do you think they could do anything?’ (Silko 195)

Rocky, “the best football player Albuquerque Indian School ever had,” (40) commits completely to a belief that the path to success is to adopt, as much as possible, the way of life that white culture pushes upon native culture: “He [Rocky] had to win, he said he was always going to win. So he listened to his teachers, and he listened to the coach. They said they were proud of him. They told him, ‘Nothing can stop you now except one thing: don’t let the people at home hold you back’” (47). Rocky shirks the “old-time ways” (47) of the reservation in favor of the facts in his textbooks. He accepts what his white teachers and coaches have told him as truth, and he even accepts their derision of his family and culture. More than that, he adopts white understandings of truth and is ashamed of his family’s “superstitions”:

He was embarrassed at what they did. He knew when they took the deer home, it would be laid out on a Navajo blanket, and Old Grandma would put a string of turquoise around its neck . . . Rocky tried to tell them that keeping the carcass on the floor in a warm room was bad for the meat. But he knew how they were. (48)

Rocky in *Ceremony* and Lucille in *Housekeeping* respond similarly to the pressure of disenchantment. Both Lucille and Rocky feel immense pressure to succumb to the dominant social norms of their surroundings, even when these norms require a buffering from the earth, and, in both these characters’ cases, a buffering from their family as well. Even Tayo, much more culturally ambivalent than Rocky, is beset with doubt in the enchanted beliefs of his people. When Rocky criticizes Uncle Josiah’s intention to raise

a herd of hardy Mexican desert cattle, claiming Josiah does not understand enough of the science behind it, Tayo immediately becomes concerned: “Tayo was suddenly sad because what Rocky said was true. What did he know about raising cattle? They weren’t scientists” (Silko 70).

That said, Tayo finds comfort in and feels resonance with, the enchanted Laguna worldview in a way that Rocky does not. The aforementioned deer ceremony, which Rocky criticizes, is based on the belief that the deer is worthy of the same respect as the man. Further, it posits the death of the deer as a willing and generous sacrifice, a choice made by the deer: “They sprinkled the cornmeal on the nose and fed the deer’s spirit. They had to show their love and respect, their appreciation; otherwise, the deer would be offended, and they would not come to die for them the following year” (47). In this conception of the relationship between hunter and deer, the deer is in no way “brute” nature. It transforms the scenario from one in which a human kills a mindless animal, to one in which two conscious beings, a “two-legged” and a “four-legged,” if you will, enter into a bond of mutual respect; the deer provides for the man’s hunger and the man in turn provides for the deer’s spirit. In the first scenario, man is alone, acting upon what is essentially an object. In the second scenario, there is a deep understanding built between hunter and deer; man is not alone but rather joined by the deer itself. It is Tayo who, on the hunting trip, first throws his jacket over the face of the deer before Rocky guts it because, “the people said you should do that before you gutted the deer. Out of respect” (47). Tayo does not dream of leaving the putative backwardness of the reservation as Rocky does; rather he is genuinely happy to accept his role helping Josiah raise the cattle and sheep and tend to the fields. Rocky seeks to alleviate the “cross-pressures” of

disenchanted and enchanted worldviews by wholeheartedly “siding” with the buffered worldview that has been imposed upon him. Tayo, however, walks a middle path, acknowledging that, on the one hand, “he had studied those books [school textbooks], and had no reasons to believe the stories any more” (94); yet on the other hand, continuing to be profoundly moved by those same stories. His grandmother began her stories by saying “ ‘Back in time immemorial, things were different, the animals could talk to human beings and many magical things still happened.’ He never lost the feeling he had in his chest when she spoke those words” (94). Tayo gives himself over to the feelings that the ancient stories of his Grandma create in him; so the objective “truth” that his teachers and his textbooks push upon him is perpetually “fragilized” (Taylor 303) by the truth that he *feels* to exist in the stories.

Although Tayo experiences cross-pressuring throughout his life, it is not until Tayo and Rocky join the army that the pressures of a disenchanted world begin to cave in on him. While he is away, Tayo experiences first the opulence of San Francisco and then the violence of the South Pacific and the deaths of Rocky at war and Josiah back home. He returns utterly broken and sick, pushed and pulled between the enchanted beliefs that he *feels* to be true and eternal, and the ugliness and confusion that modern disenchantment has cast violently across the surface of everything he knows. Tayo’s journey in *Ceremony* is in many ways a condensed and intensified reflection of Taylor’s disenchantment narrative. Tayo begins his story conflicted but strongly enmeshed in an enchanted framework of belief. He then leaves the reservation, and through his total immersion in the modern disenchanted West, is almost rendered hopeless in the face of all that has been lost.

Only through a long and challenging “ceremony,” one which brings him back into resonance with native and enchanted ways of understanding humanity’s connection both to the earth and to one another, can Tayo recognize that all he feared had been severed was truly whole, and that all he thought had been irrevocably lost had been there all along. This ceremony is not what one would expect—a sand panting or a night of chanting, praying, and dancing. Tayo’s ceremony involves these aspects, as they have the power to transmit faith and understanding, but the ceremony itself stretches throughout his entire life and beyond it, deep into the past and future; it is an interconnected chain of events (some of which are events of love, and some of which are events of trial) that brings Tayo back to the understanding that our world itself remains enchanted and we must only find our way back to it. By the end of the novel, it becomes clear that the “ceremony” in its fullest sense is the entire vast shift from enchantment to disenchantment, and it remains to be seen whether the ceremony will end in the triumph of a profoundly reconnected and re-enchanted world. Throughout the novel, Tayo is told by those who act as his spiritual guides various versions of the statement “you are part of it now” (Silko 92). At first deeply unclear, this phrase refers to the fact that once Tayo has recognized the forces of disenchantment acting on his life (Silko calls it “the witchery”), he becomes a conscious actor in this vast ceremony. Tayo’s healing begins once he understands his “part” in the ceremony: that his defeat and bitterness pushes the ceremony in one direction, while his hope and love push it in another, and that he has the power to choose with which direction he will align himself.

Tayo’s first months at home after returning from the hospital are dominated by uncontrollable vomiting, horribly vivid nightmares, and excruciating mourning for the

loss of Rocky and Josiah. This state continues with little hope for improvement until Grandma recognizes Tayo's desperation and convinces Auntie that he must see the medicine man Old Ku'oosh. "Look at him" she says, "That boy needs a medicine man. Otherwise he will have to go away" (Silko 30). Indeed, the first time the reader witnesses any improvement in Tayo's condition, albeit a minor improvement, is after his afternoon spent talking with old Ku'oosh. That night is the first time he is able to eat a solid meal, and it is fittingly the very traditional meal of blue corn meal mash and Indian tea. However, while Tayo begins to improve physically after this point, it is not until his meeting with the medicine man old Betonie, and the ceremony they perform together, that Tayo truly begins to heal. The meeting with Betonie is the pivotal moment of the novel, and Tayo's conversations with Betonie begin to reveal both the factors that contributed to Tayo's state of post-war disenchantment, as well as the changes that must be made to return him to a place of love, connection, and understanding.

When old Ku'oosh meets with Tayo, he is expecting to perform the same traditional "scalp ceremony" that he has performed on the other WWII veterans on the reservation. This ceremony is meant to purify warriors who have killed an enemy in battle. However, Tayo reveals that he does not believe he killed a single enemy, and Ku'oosh then must acknowledge that the ceremony cannot be used to help him. However, it is also suggested, by Tayo himself and by the scenes in which we are introduced to other young veterans, that this ceremony alone was not able to heal Tayo's war comrades who did kill. Tayo suggests that the old medicine man is incapable of comprehending the methods and consequences of modern warfare, and that therefore his ceremonies can no longer accomplish what they once did:

In the old way of warfare, you couldn't kill another human being without knowing it, without seeing the result . . . But the old man would not have believed white warfare – killing across great distances without knowing who or how many died. It was all too alien to comprehend . . . and even if he could have taken the old man to see the target areas . . . the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous. Ku'oosh would have looked at the dismembered corpses and atomic heat-flash outlines . . . and said something close and terrible had killed these people. Not even oldtime witches killed like that (33).

Tayo recognizes here that modern warfare relies on an intensity of buffering with which Ku'oosh and his traditional ceremonies are completely unfamiliar. To kill on a vast scale without ever seeing the face of the victims is both enabled by and perpetrates a state of buffering within which each person is profoundly emotionally disconnected from all others. Likewise, to cause damage to the earth on the scale of which Tayo speaks is not possible without the belief that the land is entirely brute and devoid of transcendent meaning. It requires that all knowledge of our continuity with earth has disappeared from our social imaginary, that it is now no more than a quiet whisper that makes us feel lost and confused in a way we cannot understand.

Understanding intuitively that what ails Tayo may be beyond his experience, Old Ku'oosh tells Tayo's grandma that he should go to see a medicine man named old Betonie, who lives in the hills above Gallup, a nearby city off of the Laguna reservation. Betonie is unlike other medicine men; he is not a pureblood Indian, his grandmother "was a remarkable Mexican with green eyes" (Silko 119). Old Betonie openly acknowledges that he does not perform the ceremonies in the ways of the other medicine men, but he

believes that in the modern, rapidly changing world, this modified approach is the only way that ceremonies can maintain their power and efficacy:

At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong (116).

Tayo cannot be helped by the traditional ceremonies of a medicine man such as Ku'oosh, and in truth neither can the others who fought with him or other natives such as Tayo's mother, because these traditional ceremonies were created when disenchantment and the buffering it brings with it, had not yet descended upon native people.

One of the first things Tayo and Betonie speak about is Tayo's state of loss, emptiness and confusion when he first returns from fighting in the Pacific. When Tayo gets back, he spends a significant amount of time (how long exactly we do not know) in the mental ward of a VA hospital. As scenes from Tayo's time in the jungles of the Pacific are retold, it becomes clear that over the course of his deployment, and particularly after Rocky's death, Tayo's mental condition declines rapidly. Even before Rocky's death, Tayo begins to conflate the faces of Japanese soldiers with those of Indians from the reservation at home:

When the sergeant told them to kill all the Japanese soldiers lined up in front of the cave . . . Tayo could not pull the trigger . . . in that instant he saw Josiah standing there . . . So Tayo stood there, stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall, and he *knew* it was Josiah; and even after

Rocky started shaking him by the shoulders and telling him to stop crying, it was *still* Josiah lying there (Silko 7).

Soon after this, Tayo's platoon is captured by the Japanese and Rocky is mortally injured.

In the moments before Rocky's death, Tayo's confusion persists:

The short one had stopped and looked at Rocky in the blanket; he called the tall one over. The tall one looked like a Navajo guy from Fort Defiance that Tayo had known at Indian School . . . It was then that Tayo got confused, and he called this tall Jap soldier Willie Begay; 'You remember him, Willie, he's my brother, best football player Albuquerque Indian School ever had. (40)

Moments later the soldier kills the dying Rocky with the butt of his rifle. Tayo's disorientation here becomes profoundly traumatic for him. The white doctors in the VA hospital tell Tayo that it was simply a malarial hallucination, that it was impossible his Uncle Josiah could have been there in the jungle, and that he must disregard what he feels. However, this denial only contributes to Tayo's sickness and confusion because he can recognize the objective validity of what the doctors tell him, but he cannot shake the feeling that what he saw was true. He tells Betonie, "My uncle Josiah was there that day. Yet I know he couldn't have been there. He was thousands of miles away, at home in Laguna . . . I understand that. I know he couldn't have been there. But I've got this feeling and it won't go away even though I know he wasn't there" (124).

Old Betonie suggests a very different explanation than the white doctors for Tayo's visions: "The Japanese . . . it isn't surprising you saw him with them . . . you saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers . . . You saw what the evil had done; you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world" (Silko 124). In a

historical sense, Betonie here is probably referring to the fact that the Japanese and Native Americans most likely shared a common ancestor before one group split off and crossed the Bering land bridge. However, to use Taylor's words and to better get at the medicine man's meaning, Betonie understands Tayo's vision as a moment where Tayo was completely unbuffered. In these moments, Tayo is open to the recognition of the intimate similarities between the Japanese and Native Americans instead of existing within the buffered state where all that is visible are their differences. When old Betonie says, "You saw what the evil had done; you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world," he is suggesting that in that moment of clarity, Tayo witnessed the consequences of the spread of disenchantment (which can be equated with this concept of "witchery"). He saw that it is responsible for creating false lines of division between the people of the earth, for emphasizing shallow differences instead of the essential uniting force of shared humanity.

Betonie then tells Tayo the story of this "witchery. He explains it as a force that is responsible for, but predates, the coming of the white man. His myth suggests that the witchery is a power of division that corrupted the white people and then used them as a tool to divide and corrupt Native Americans. Betonie begins his story after Tayo speaks to him about his encounter with another young veteran from the reservation: "He [Emo] talks about their [white peoples'] cities and all the machines and food they have. He says the land is no good and we must go after what they have . . . I don't know how to say this but I wonder what good Indian ceremonies can do against the sickness that comes from their wars, their bombs, their lies?" (Silko 122). Betonie responds,

That is the trickery of the witchcraft . . . They want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction . . . But white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates . . . we can deal with white people, with their machines and their beliefs. We can because we invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made white people in the first place (Silko 122).

Betonie then tells a story of how a group of witches from all over the world--“Some had slanty eyes others had black skin” (123)--got together in a time before white people to compete in a contest of “dark things.” As the witches compete and display evils to one another, one witch “just told them to listen: ‘What I have is a story’ ”:

laugh if you want to
but as I tell the story
it will begin to happen.

Set in motion now
set in motion by our witchery
to work for us.

Caves across the ocean
in caves of dark hills
white skin people like the belly of a fish
covered with hair.

Then they grow away from the earth
then they grow away from the sun
then they grow away from the plants and animals.
They see no life
When they look
they see only objects.
The world is a dead thing for them
the trees and rivers are not alive
the mountains and stones are not alive.
The deer and bear are objects
They see no life.

They fear
They fear the world.
They destroy what they fear.
They fear themselves.
The wind will blow them across the ocean
thousands of them in giant boats
swarming like larva out of a crushed ant hill . . .

They will fear what they find
They will fear the people
They kill what they fear . . .

And those they do not kill
will die anyway
at the destruction they see
at the loss
at the loss of the children
the loss will destroy the rest.

Stolen rivers and mountains
the stolen land will eat their hearts
and jerk their mouths from the Mother (126).

Betonie's description of the white people--that they have grown away from the earth and see no life in the trees, rivers, deer and bears, only objects--is strikingly similar to Taylor's description of the state of buffering that is integral to disenchantment, and the attendant belief in nature as a brute and separate entity. Taylor suggests that in the " 'enchanted' premodern imaginary . . . all kinds of nonhuman things *mean* – are loaded and charged with meaning – independent of human perception or attribution . . . it was also assumed that *power* resided in things" (Smith 29). He explains that this allowed for a social imaginary in which "the natural world was constituted as a cosmos that functioned semiotically, as a sign that pointed beyond itself, to what was *more* than nature" (Smith, 27). He contrasts this with the modern, disenchanted social imaginary, in which "Significance no longer inheres in things; rather, meaning and significance are a

property of minds who perceive meaning internally” (Smith 29). Although Taylor’s words are more abstract, his meaning is at its core the same as Betonie’s. If objects, animals, and the physical earth are believed to themselves contain no meaning and power, then it naturally follows that “trees and rivers are not alive,” that “the deer and bear are objects / They see no life.” Likewise, if only humans possess and generate meaning, then how could they not understand themselves as strictly distinct from and above all other forms on the Earth? It is then an inevitable consequence that “they grow away the earth / then they grow away from the sun / then they grow away from the plants and animals”. Betonie calls it “witchery” while Taylor calls it disenchantment. However, they both understand the same thing: long ago a force of buffering began to infect white (European) communities, which then transmitted it to native communities the world over through colonialism.

Old Betonie takes the scruple to point out that in this story the “witchery” is a force that exists independently of the white people who carry it. This distinction must be understood because if Tayo and other natives focus their rage on those who are carriers of this “witchery,” without understanding what the witchery itself does, then the evil products of the witchery will be insidiously furthered within native peoples as well. The witchery is a force of division; it divides man from the earth, man from the animals, man from himself. It tricks man into believing that all parts of the Earth are not “of the same essential nature,” tricks man into suffering under the weight of an isolation that is his own tragic illusion. If native people focus their rage on white people, then the witchery has once again grown more powerful. Betonie here is in no way absolving white people of the evils of their past and present, or claiming that they have not played an immediate

role in the suffering of native communities, but rather he is suggesting that what is at the base of those evils is something far more universal, something that surpasses racial or cultural boundaries; to address only the symptom and not the root of the witchery can only lead to further division and the promotion of greater evil and suffering. In a strange way, although the witchery is an evil force, it also has the potential to be a unifying one.

It must also be clarified that although Betonie's words at first may seem to suggest that white people have never existed as anything other than a tool of the witchery, it is more likely that his intention is rather to distinguish between modern and pre-modern cultures. Betonie begins his legend by telling Tayo "it was Indian witchery that made white people in the first place. Long time ago / in the beginning / there were no white people in this world/ there was nothing European" (Silko 122). However, I would suggest that what he means by this is that if we travel far enough back into pre-modern times, we reach a point at which all cultures and ethnic groups would be considered "native" by modern people. The very essence of Taylor's enchantment/disenchantment argument relies upon the fact that pre-modern Europeans operated within a deeply enchanted belief system. Taylor spends much of the first chapter of *A Secular Age* ("The Bulwarks of Belief") outlining how the "pagan" belief system of pre-modern Europeans, which attributed tremendous power and meaning to the Earth and its creatures, was gradually dismantled as stricter cultural and religious lines were drawn throughout Europe. Taylor says of these early Europeans, "500 years ago . . . they lived in a world of spirits, both good and bad . . . in the pre-modern world, meanings are not only in minds, but can reside in things, or in various kinds of extra-human but intra-cosmic subjects" (Taylor 32). I believe that Betonie's story mirrors Taylor's story of disenchantment;

therefore I believe that when Betonie speaks of the “white people” or “Europeans,” he is really referring to those who have already become disenchanting. The “witchery” is not ultimately inherent within white or European people. Such a reading is supported by the fact that when the legend of the witchery begins, it says of the white people, “*Then* they grow away from the earth,” the word “then” suggesting that there was an initial time in which they had not yet been severed from their earth. This distinction is vital: to believe that the witchery adhered to a single racial group would be to abide an essential division between the races of the earth, a belief that already festers in modernity—the very belief that Taylor and Betonie work to dismantle.

By the time Tayo comes to meet with Betonie, he has already been profoundly impacted by the witchery. Before Betonie performs his later sand painting ceremony, or tells Tayo the story of the witchery, they sit together in his Hogan dug into the mountainside. Tayo tells Betonie about his experiences in the Pacific, his loss of Josiah and Rocky, his period of profound emptiness in the VA hospital, and his ongoing sickness. Betonie says to Tayo, “I’m beginning to see something . . . This has been going on a long time. They will try to stop you from completing the ceremony” (Silko 115). What Betonie means here is that he has begun to recognize a pattern in Tayo’s life, which he believes can be understood as a series of intertwined events (reaching far before and beyond Tayo’s own life) that have the potential to act as a ceremony to empower Tayo to combat the forces of witchery. The “They” to which Betonie refers is all those who have become unwitting tools and vessels of the witchery. Tayo, however, is initially frustrated by Betonie’s words; he snaps at him “Look . . . I’ve been sick, and half the time I don’t know if I’m still crazy or not. I don’t know anything about ceremonies or these things

you talk about. I don't know how long anything has been going on. I just need help" (Silko 115). Tayo's response here is emblematic of modern man's instinctive rejection of any answer/solution that is intangible or appeals to transcendent forces. Tayo craves a simple answer; he wants a single defined ceremony, such as the scalp ceremony, that will "fix" him, or else he wants the white people's medicine to work. He wants Betonie to tell him what is wrong and how to fix it. Tayo wants to divide his own struggle and suffering from the greater pattern of witchery/disenchantment that dominates the world; rather, perhaps it is more fair to say he does not yet see them as one. However, this very impulse of isolation and division exacerbates the buffered state. Betonie responds to Tayo,

'We all have been waiting for help for a long time. But it never has been easy. The people must do it. You must do it' . . . Tayo's stomach clenched around the words . . . There was something large and terrifying in the old man's words. He wanted to yell at the medicine man, to yell things the white doctors had yelled at him – that he had to think only of himself, and not about the others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like "we" and "us." But he had known the answer all along, even while the white doctors were telling him he could get well and he was trying to believe them: medicine didn't work that way, because the world didn't work that way. His sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything (Silko 115).

This passage, clear and elegant in its simplicity, illustrates why Tayo (and more broadly modern humans as a whole) typically struggle to understand and alleviate the state of

anomie, i.e., the lack of fullness, that results from a disenchanted world. The witchery is a force of division; it divides us from our Earth and it divides us from one another. We are therefore left buffered and isolated. However, when we attempt to treat the feelings of sadness or loss that may accompany this isolation, we instead often inadvertently contribute to it because we are already trapped within the misconception that the problem, the sickness, is something isolated within ourselves. Once again, the evil of the witchery is perpetuated as we try to heal isolation with an isolated approach. Lukács says of the ancient Greeks “the world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars.” Silko and Betonie argue that the world is still that way; only we have become confused and fail to see it.

Tayo’s night with Betonie is the turning point in the novel. After their initial conversation, they travel at night further up into the mountains and perform a sand painting ceremony. Old Betonie is clear that the ceremony in its entirety is far larger than the single ritual; but the ritual, which utilizes physical materials (such as sand and sacred plants) and physical actions (such as walking through hoops and chanting) to grasp and communicate deeply intangible truths, helps to remove the sharp barrier between the mind and the world, and gently leads Tayo toward an unbuffered state. In her piece “The Feminine Landscape of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*,” Paula Gunn Allen eloquently explains this power of ritual and story: “the stories are the communication device of the land and the people. Through stories, the ceremony, the gap between isolate human being and lonely landscape is closed. And through them Tayo understands in mind and in bone the truth of his and our situation” (Allen 234). Allen’s assertion here is powerfully evinced by Tayo’s experience the morning after the ritual.

Tayo stood on the edge of the rimrock and looked down below; the canyons and valleys were thick powdery black . . . He remembered the black of the sand paintings on the floor of the Hogan; the hills and mountains were the mountains and hills they had painted in the sand. He took a deep breath of cold mountain air; there were no boundaries; the world below and the sand paintings inside became the same that night. The mountains from all the directions had been gathered there that night (Silko 135).

This feeling, that there are “no boundaries” between the outside and the inside, continues to grow in Tayo for the rest of the novel, and it is the essence of what heals him.

It is important here to make a clarification. Due to the limits of language, it has often been necessary in this essay to say things such as: disenchantment in the modern West has led to “the isolation of man within his own conscience, separated both from his fellow man and from his environment.” However, in a small yet important way, using this type of phrasing perpetuates the very division that Silko, Taylor, Latour, and so many others work to dismantle. This is so because referring to separation from fellow man and separation from environment as two separate phenomenon lends the impression that “man” and “environment” or “nature” are two separate entities. There is no division between humanity and the earth; they are unified and continuous, and it is the inability of modern man to recognize this unity that is at the core of disenchantment. Allen explains this beautifully, especially as it relates to *Ceremony*, when she says,

The earth is the source and the being of the people, and we are equally the being of the earth. The land is not really a place, separate from ourselves, where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies; the witchery makes us believe that false

idea. The earth is not a mere source of survival, distant from the creatures it nurtures and from the spirit that breathes in us . . . We must not conceive of the earth as an ever-dead other that supplies us with a sense of ego identity by virtue of our contrast to its perceived non-being. Rather, for American Indians like Betonie, the earth is being, as all creatures are also being; aware, palpable, intelligent, alive. Had Tayo known clearly what Standing Bear articulated – that “in the Indian the spirit of the land is still vested,” that human beings “must be born and reborn to belong” so that their bodies are “formed from the dust of their forefathers” – he would not be ill (Allen 234).

When we strip the earth of all of its humanity, we ourselves are left isolated, a strange “meaningful” anomaly in an inert world. Allen suggests, “the earth is the source and being of the people.” In fact, such a stated belief can, ironically, be found to pervade modern society; atheists devoted only to science would state that man has quite literally evolved from the smallest most basic creatures of the earth, while fundamentalist Christians who vehemently deny the theory of evolution would accept that the Bible states that “the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7). And yet, almost all members of modern Western society at least tacitly deny the vitality of the earth. Given that, in truth, the human and the natural are utterly continuous, it is inevitable that denying the vitality of the earth corresponds with denying the vitality of both ourselves and other human beings.

Tayo works hard to build faith in Standing Bear’s dictum that “in the Indian the spirit of the land is still vested”; however, his struggle is compounded by the fact that the majority of people around him are occupied in denying the vitality of the earth and

humanity. At home, Tayo constantly feels the shame and resentment of Auntie, his mixed race and ignominious origins thereby contributing to his feelings of isolation. Rocky and Josiah, the two people he loved the most--Josiah being the person who, in his understated way, taught Tayo about ceremony and the earth--have both recently died, and Tayo feels significant guilt for both of their deaths. In addition, despite his efforts, he can find no solace or community with his friends who also fought in the war because they one and all choose to glorify their experiences in the war and focus all their anger on what the white man has taken. They lust for the luxuries they have witnessed in white society, while neglecting the beauty and power that remains in their own earth and people. Speaking of going out drinking with his war buddies, Tayo says, "The night progressed according to the ritual; from cursing the barren dry land the white man had left them, to talking about San Diego and the cities where the white women were still waiting for them" (Silko 57). Even as Tayo's faith in humanity's enchanted unity with the earth grows, his interactions with these men continues to foster doubt in himself: "It was difficult then to call up the feeling the stories had, the feeling of Ts'eh and old Betonie. It was easier to feel and to believe the rumors. Crazy. Crazy Indian. Seeing things. Imagining things" (Silko 242). Tayo's battle is one of faith-building; it is a battle he struggles to win, so long as all those around him, with their absolute surrender to a disenchanted existence, unwittingly undermine his faith. As Taylor explains, "Living in the enchanted, porous world of our ancestors was inherently living socially" (42). Similarly, Silko writes,

An old sensitivity had descended in her [Auntie], surviving thousands of years from the oldest times, when the people shared a single clan name . . . the people

shared the same consciousness . . . the old instinct has always been to gather the feelings and opinions that were scattered through the village, to gather them like willow twigs and tie them into a single prayer bundle that would bring peace to all of them (62).

Clearly, an enchanted existence is inherently a communal one. Therefore, until Tayo gains community, i.e. experiences genuinely unbuffered relations to those around him, he remains unable to shirk the doubt that his newfound enchanted faith is simply foolish superstition. Allen explains that

The healing of Tayo and the land results from the reunification of land and person. Tayo is healed when he understands, in magical (mystical) and loving ways, that his being is within and outside him, that it includes his mother, Night Swan, Ts'eh, Josiah, the spotted cattle, winter, hope, love, and the starry universe of Betonie's ceremony. (234)

Tayo cannot fully recognize that "his being is within and outside him" until he experiences a relationship with another person who will not only care for his being, but also affirm the validity of his growing faith in "the reunification of land and person." Betonie begins to provide this source of unbuffered community, but it is not fully realized, and Tayo's doubt not alleviated until he is with the woman Ts'eh.

Ts'eh, whom he meets by "chance" (it was also predicted by Betonie as part of the ceremony) as he rides through the reservation searching for Josiah's long lost cattle, is more profoundly embedded in the continuity of human and earth than anyone yet introduced in the novel. She is a medicine woman of sorts who travels throughout the land searching and gathering the plants that she replants and nurtures in quiet ceremony:

“He went with her to learn about the roots and plants she had gathered . . . ‘This one contains the color of the sky after a summer rainstorm. I’ll [Ts’eh will] take it from here and plant it in another place, a canyon where it hasn’t rained for a while” (224). Indeed Ts’eh’s name alone communicates her intimate relationship with the earth. In her piece “Local Screenings, Transversal Meanings: Leslie Silko’s *Ceremony* and Michael Dorris’s/Louis Erdrich’s *The Crown of Columbus* as Global Novels,” Birgit Däwes writes,

Ts’eh is more than a lover and a therapist: she represents the land and the spirits . . . this character’s first name is a short version of Tsepi’na – ‘The Woman Veiled in Clouds’ – the Laguna name of Mount Taylor, the effect of which is doubled by her surname (‘I am a Montaña’ [223]). ‘Ts’eh also stands for ‘Ts’its’tsi’nako,’ i.e., for ‘Reed Woman, Spider Woman, Yellow Woman, on and on’ indicating her spiritual layers of identity. (249)

Ts’eh’s love for Tayo is wrapped together with her love for all creatures, her love for the earth. She understands the truth of all that Tayo yearns for and she is capable of guiding him toward it and providing him with a love that sustains him even when they are separated for weeks or months at a time: “Their days together had a gravity emanating from the mesas and arroyos, and it replaced the rhythm that had been interrupted so long ago” (227). Only after loving Ts’eh can Tayo cast off his doubt that the white man has taken something essential that cannot be regained; cast off his doubt that the unity he feels with his earth is a superstition; and enable him to in all confidence fight the witchery, of which his war buddies have become unwitting and violent agents:

The dreams had been terror at loss, at something lost forever; but nothing was lost: all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself. He had lost nothing. The snow-covered mountain remained, without regard to titles of ownership or the white ranchers who possessed it . . . The mountain outdistances their destruction just as love had outdistanced death. The mountain could not be lost to them, because it was in their bones; Josiah and Rocky were not far away. They were close; they had always been close. And he loved them then as he had always loved them, the feeling pulsing over him as strong as it had ever been. They loved him that way; he could still feel the love they had for him. The damage that had been done had never reached this feeling. This was their life, vitality locked deep in blood memory, and the people were strong, and the fifth world endured, and nothing was ever lost as long as the love remained. (220)

Finally, Tayo is at peace; he recognizes the power of the earth and his place within it. He recognizes that the witchery has only the power that we give it and that a love surpassing all buffers waits for us just beyond disenchantment's veil.

Chapter Three – The Liminal Novelist

This chapter studies the formal and structural tools that Silko utilizes to enable the intertwining of a profoundly enchanted story with a traditionally disenchanting literary

form, and how such an intertwining allows the story to remain relatable to a primarily disenchanted readership. The power of Silko's vision and the message of *Ceremony* are thrown into high relief when compared with relatively contemporaneous American novels such as *Housekeeping* and *The Catcher in the Rye*. In this light, it becomes clear that Silko has accomplished the rare and impressive feat of evading Lukács' paradox of the novelist, while still writing in the form of the novel. Lukács' theory of the novel is based on his belief that, unlike the ancient Greeks (and similar cultures), who understood themselves as continuous with and made up of the same essential nature as their world, "We [moderns] have found the only true substance within ourselves: that is why we have to place an unbridgeable chasm between cognition and action, between soul and created structure, between self and world" (34). Strongly in line with Taylor, this statement suggests that once we understood meaning as existing only within the human subject, we became sharply severed (buffered) from all that exists outside of our own minds. The consequence of this worldview on the art we create, is that art can no longer be a faithful reflection of the world "for all the models have gone; it [art] is a created totality, for the natural unity of the metaphysical spheres has been destroyed forever" (37). The "models are gone" because we have emptied the world of meaning; so there is nothing within it to be reflected within our art. Art then becomes a "created totality" because it cannot be in communion with an empty world, so it then must contain and reflect only the meaning we put into it. Lukács then postulates that if "a totality that can be simply accepted is no longer given to the forms of art" (meaning that if art is no longer understood as an expression and reflection of the inherent being that exists within our world), then the novelist is left with only with the two choices discussed in the introduction:

they must either volatilize whatever has to be given form to the point where they can encompass it, or else they must show polemically the impossibility of achieving their necessary object and the inner nullity of their own means. And in this case they carry the fragmentary nature of the world's structure into the world of forms (38).

Trapped in a world without meaning, the novelist can either attempt to ignore the “chasm between self and world” by breaking up the reality they wish to convey into small, easily digestible, pieces, “volatilizing” it; or the novelist can instead focus on the chasm itself and create a literary reflection of their own inability to cross it.

Silko, however, neither shies away from acknowledging the “chasm between soul and world” that exists in the modern West (in fact what she names “the witchery” arguably refers to the selfsame chasm), nor does she give in to Lukács’ assertion that the chasm cannot be bridged. Her protagonist is one who has fallen “prey to the power of the demon and overreach[ed] [himself]” (90); or otherwise put, a soul that suffers and yearns for fullness within the immanent confines of modernity. Let us revisit the iconic following quotation by Lukács:

the God-forsakenness of the world reveals itself as a lack of substance [to the demonic protagonist] . . . and the empty transience behind which attractive landscapes were previously to be seen is suddenly transformed into a glass wall against which men beat in vain, like bees against a window, incapable of breaking through, incapable of understanding that the way is barred (90).

Silko defies Lukács’ prediction, guiding Tayo through the glass wall, revealing that it truly was immaterial all along.

The structure of *Ceremony* contributes significantly both to its power and its approachability. The beginning of the novel appears to conform almost perfectly to Lukács' conception of the realist novel and its hero. Granted, Silko intersperses verses of traditional Laguna myths within the main text, but they are short and their connection to the text of the novel is not immediately evident; and so, in the beginning, they can be easily dismissed by the reader as a sort of artistic decoration—"local color," so to speak--if they so choose. Otherwise, the text is strictly realist, with all elements that could be perceived as "supernatural" or transcendent seeming to be simply a result of Tayo's trauma in the wake of the war. Similarly, the world of *Ceremony* appears as the disenchanted one we are intimately familiar with, and Tayo as a prototypical "Lukácsian" hero. When *Ceremony* begins, and Tayo is still in the VA hospital, he experiences himself as so completely severed from the world that he feels literally immaterial: "For a long time he had been white smoke . . . It faded into the white world of their bed sheets and walls; it was sucked away by the words of doctors who tried to talk to the invisible scattered smoke" (Silko 12). Soon after, when he has been released from the hospital and is waiting for his train home, the feeling returns, "Tayo felt weak, and the longer he walked the more his legs felt as though they might become invisible again . . . he knew he was going to become invisible right there. It was too late to ask for help, and he waited to die the way smoke dies" (15). For almost the next hundred pages, Tayo continues in a pattern of extreme illness, horrific nightmares, and heavy drinking. While this period is occasionally punctuated by moments of hope, in which Tayo begins to feel himself healed through his resonance with the earth, the first half of the book is dominated by Tayo's unsuccessful struggle to escape the belief that both he and his world are broken,

that the white man has stolen and destroyed the Earth, leaving him and his people irrevocably severed from it.

Even after he has begun his meeting with Betonie, on page 107 of 244, his doubt in potential for healing and reunion is palpable,

He wanted to believe old Betonie. He wanted to keep the feeling of his words alive inside himself so that he could believe that he might get well. But when the old man left, he was suddenly aware of the old hogan . . . all of it seemed so pitiful and small compared to the world he knew the white people had . . . All Betonie owned in the world was in this room. What kind of healing power was in this? (Silko 117)

At this point Tayo has not yet realized that nothing has been truly lost or severed; the earth and he himself already possess within themselves everything that is needed to repair the damage that has been done. To reiterate: “nothing was lost: all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself. He had lost nothing. The snow-covered mountain remained, without regard to titles of ownership or the white ranchers who possessed it . . . The mountain outdistances their destruction just as love had outdistanced death” (220). However, as long as he fails to understand this, and he searches for medicine or people who can “cure” him, then he is the Lukácsian hero, who yearns to be reconnected with the world and himself, but ultimately resigns himself to its impossibility: “This vain search and then the resignation with which it is abandoned make the circle that completes the form [of the novel]” (Lukács 85).

As *Ceremony* progresses, Silko quietly includes moments throughout the novel that offer a modern analogue to the “transcendental topography of the Greek mind” that

Lukács describes, thereby gradually moving the text away from the world of the novel and toward the world of the epic. Such moments convey a sense of this essential unity between “the soul and the stars” without relying heavily on Laguna symbols or legends. Even when Laguna legend is used, the meaning for which it stands is clear and profound regardless of the reader’s prior experience with such traditions. For example, in a flashback to his childhood, Tayo remembers proudly showing Josiah a pile of dead flies he had killed in the kitchen because his school teacher had told them flies were “bad and carry sickness” (Silko 93). Josiah responds

Well, I didn’t go to school much, so I don’t know about that but you see, long time ago, way back in the time immemorial, the mother of the people got angry at them for the way they were behaving . . . The animals disappeared, the plants disappeared, and no rain came for a long time . . . It was the greenbottle fly that went to her, asking forgiveness for the people. Since that time the people have been grateful for what the fly did for us. (93)

Josiah bases his reprimand of young Tayo on Laguna myth, referring to “time immemorial,” “the mother of the people,” and the service of the greenbottle fly. However, the details of the myth need not be understood or believed in full for one to recognize the deep respect and appreciation for non-human life upon which such a worldview is built. A similar situation occurs when Robert and Josiah lay the deer they have recently killed on a blanket in the living room and decorate his antlers with necklaces and rings. The image of the traditional ritual is moving because it creates an immediate and visceral understanding of the gratitude that is paid to the deer. Such moments begin to transform the novel into something more like the epic literature of

ancient “Integrated Civilizations” as described by Lukács (Lukács 29). Modern literature is marked by “the essential difference between the self and the world, the incongruence of soul and deed” (29), whereas the literature of integrated civilizations is marked by the fact that “the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars . . . Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful and rounded in this duality” (29). Moments such as these with the flies and the deer clearly belong to the second category, in that no “essential difference” is recognized between the animal and the human, both are given the same degree of respect; the deer, the human, and the fly are understood to possess the same “essential nature.” Therefore, Robert, Josiah and Tayo’s interactions with these creatures become “meaningful and rounded in this duality.”

However, at this point in the story, Tayo himself has not yet fully accepted the power and truth of such beliefs, and so the story remains poised between novel and epic. Perhaps the most powerful of these transitional moments between novel and epic is Tayo’s flashback to visiting the hidden canyon stream before he leaves for the war.

Josiah never told him much about praying, except that it should be something he felt inside himself. So that last summer, before the war, he got up before dawn and rode the bay mare south to the spring in the narrow canyon . . . He had picked flowers along the path, flowers with yellow long petals the color of the sunlight. He shook the pollen from them gently and sprinkled it over the water; he laid the blossoms beside the pool and waited . . . The things he did seemed right, as he imagined with his heart the rituals the cloud priests performed during a drought. (Silko 1977, 93)

Tayo has gone to the canyon to pray for rain; yet, like the majority of those reading *Ceremony*, he does not know the traditional prayers or rituals; and so he relies on feeling alone, allowing the land itself to guide him. Once again, as Dāwes describes, Tayo “spans a bridge to the reader,” offering him or her the opportunity to witness through him what it might look like to search, blind yet faithful, for a more integrated, enchanted, unbuffered relationship to the world. Lukàcs says of modern man “the outside world to which we now devote ourselves in our desire to learn its ways and dominate it will never speak to us in a voice that will clearly tell us our way and determine our goal” (86), whereas the heroes of the epic “are guided by the gods; whether what awaits at the end of the road are the embers of annihilation or the joys of success, or both at once, they never walk alone, they are always led” (86). Tayo does not yet have the same surety of guidance as the epic hero, but it is evident that the outside world *does*, or at the very least is beginning to, “speak to him in a voice that will clearly tell him his way.”

Silko is cautious with the amount of Laguna legend she includes in *Ceremony*, presumably so as not to distance disenchanting readers from the story. And yet, she carefully interweaves a select few throughout the novel, often breaking them up into smaller pieces that may be located many pages apart. She does not introduce them or explain them; the prose simply stops and gives way to several lines of myth (placed centrally on the page and broken into verses as an epic poem might be) before the prose and the main plot resume again. However, as the novel progresses, the relation of the myth to the novel becomes increasingly clear. For example, in one legend a trickster comes to the village and distracts the people away from their care of the “mother corn altar” with his false magic until “Our Mother” gets fed up and leaves with the plants, the

animals, and the rainclouds (Silko 42). This legend gradually reveals itself to the attentive reader as a parable for the ways in which the flashy, yet ultimately empty, advances and luxuries of modernity distract modern man from his relationship to and care for his earth. Intertwining the novel and myth in this way, reveals the roles that myth and legend play in “integrated civilizations.” It shows how they serve to organize and predict the world, to make it familiar and close, therefore enabling the innate security in the world Lukács describes in the epic hero, and which we witness in Lena from *Light in August*.

Ceremony does not fully assume its mythic dimension until the final ten pages of the novel, in which Tayo, who has found peace with Ts’eh, living outdoors while tending the cattle, is being chased down by supposed friends and fellow veterans. They have convinced themselves and others that Tayo’s living outside is a mark of his returned insanity and they are attempting to bring him back to the VA hospital. The novel reaches its climax as Emo, Leroy and Pinkie stumble drunk around a fire made at an abandoned uranium mine, torturing Harley (a good friend of Tayo’s) to lure Tayo out of hiding. Tayo crouches behind them, about to lunge out and stab a screwdriver into Emo’s skull, but at the very last minute he pulls back, recognizing that to respond in such a way would only further the divisive aims of the witchery: “Their deadly ritual for the autumn solstice would have been completed by him. He would have been another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud; and the Army doctors would say that the indications of this end had been there all along” (Silko 235). To end the novel in such a way would be to confirm Lukács’ assertion that the heroes of the novel “in their poetically necessary youthfulness, are destroyed by trying to turn his [the author’s] faith into reality” (85). Tayo would have attempted to turn Silko’s faith into a reality by believing himself healed

through recognition of his eternal relationship to the earth and through the love of Ts'eh, illustrated by his choosing to live outdoors in the oasis of the canyon, only to have others view his healing as insanity and drag him back to the mental ward. Had this been the ending, truly we would have been "forced to see the uselessness of the struggle and the final victory of reality" (Lukács 85). Silko herself acknowledges the pull that such an ending exerts on the author,

In a lot of ways some of the things he [Tayo] goes through turn out to be the kinds of things, as I was writing the novel, that I was going through. Like the part where Ts'eh warns him that they want the story to end with him being killed out there.

With the way of American writing and violence and the Bonnie and Clyde mentality of American art, I realized that the book predictably would end that way. That was how it was going, that was how it was set up, that's how an Indian character in this situation in modern American fiction would be expected to end.

I realized that, and I hated it. So I had her say to Tayo, 'Don't let this end like that.' Basically it's me saying that to myself. (Arnold 40)

Silko's refusal to end her novel in this manner marks her divergence from Lukács' theory of the novel. Tayo is not destroyed by turning Silko's "faith into reality," rather he is healed by it. It is Silko's faith that courses through the novel, revealed in the knowledge and love of Ts'eh and old Betonie. It is Silko's faith that returns to the story the power of the mythic dimension, as her own belief that "the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars" (Lukács 29) animates her story with an ancient, enchanted perspective that Lukács believes unattainable in the world of the novel. Dāwes argues of this pivotal scene at the abandoned uranium mine that

Tayo's life is directly linked to that of the humanity at large. Here he becomes aware of 'the pattern, the way all the stories fit together . . . to become the story that was still being told' (246) . . . If he behaves peacefully in this narrative, he will save the world. Beyond Tayo's scope of action this point breaks apart the novel's time frame and raises an immediate, present claim, spanning a bridge to the readers to include them in the responsibility of discursive action. And just as Tayo becomes the narrative agent of universal endurance, the reader may follow his courage by replacing a culture-limited focus with a globally human perspective (251).

Only by refusing the disenchanted paradox of the novel, is Silko capable of extending this metaphorical hand to her reader.

The typical modern Western reader does not have a pre-existing framework of belief through which he/she can view the enchanted notions of metaphysical unity and "witchery" that arise in *Ceremony*. Therefore, Silko leads the reader into belief gradually; in fact, she almost tricks them into belief, by beginning the novel with nearly perfect realism, and then gradually builds both our empathy for and connection to Tayo, as well as her model of the ceremony that Tayo must complete to defeat the witchery. The way in which she does this almost allows the reader to forget that the narrative world is becoming something foreign from his/her own, even as it transitions from the familiar world of a Lukácsian novel to the world of an epic myth, in which the mountains are made of the same essential nature as our soul, and an ancient force of witchery wars with the forces of hope and unity. Silko's ability to make what would once have felt wholly foreign and unbelievable, feel comfortable and true, allows the reader to see

himself/herself as a part of the ceremony that Tayo is undergoing (which Silko explicitly states can include all people), without being alienated by enchanted elements that could potentially elicit disbelief or discomfort. The world Silko creates remains our own even as it is transformed into something far more expansive and unbuffered than what we know, and in so doing, she allows the reader to recognize that the same potential for transformation and expansion that is witnessed in her story, has the potential to occur within his/her world as well; there is the power of *Ceremony*.

Conclusion – “Bright Rally-Flags of Hope and Emulation”

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature, John Steinbeck spoke passionately on the role and responsibility of the writer, stating that he is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement. Furthermore, the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit – for gallantry in defeat – for courage, compassion and love. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally-flags of hope and of emulation. I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man, has no dedication nor any membership in literature.⁵

Such an understanding of the role of the writer is completely at odds with the inescapable limitations that Lukàcs argues the modern novelist suffers beneath. The foundational principle in Lukàcs' theory is that the novelist must inevitably acknowledge that his faith cannot be made reality; he may struggle desperately to bring his intimations of the potential for an integrated soul and world into existence, but ultimately he will fail. This is a far far cry from the "bright rally-flag of hope and emulation" that Steinbeck charges the writer with creating. Lukàcs does not deny that man has a "capacity for greatness of heart and spirit"; in fact, such a *capacity* is integral to his concept of the man "possessed by the demon." However, Lukàcs does assert that this capacity cannot be fulfilled in our modern "quietly decaying world." Such is the state of the demonic man, pushed to the edge of madness by his recognition of both his capacity for greatness and his inability to achieve it. Thus, Lukàcs does not allow for "the perfectibility of man," and, in

⁵ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1962/steinbeck/25229-john-steinbeck-banquet-speech-1962/>

Steinbeck's eyes, such an absence of faith in the potential of humanity "has no dedication nor any membership in literature." What Steinbeck invokes in his speech, which remains strikingly absent in Lukàcs theory and criticism, is the notion of the responsibility of the author to his readers and to his world. For Lukàcs, the disenchanted lack of "fullness" in our world is a foregone and immutable conclusion, and so, he appears to consider as impossible (or perhaps rather not to consider at all) the substantial power of the author to contribute to an effort to lift this yoke of disenchantment. For Steinbeck, as well as for Taylor, we are undoubtedly enmeshed in "a war against weakness and despair," but the outcome is far from decided.

The irony of a stance such as Lukàcs' is that it serves to *make* a reality that it has already assumed to *be* reality; that is, by arguing that the chasm between self and world cannot be bridged, he makes the chasm that much more difficult to bridge. It is as if a tightrope walker, about to step onto the rope, repeated to himself over and over how likely it is that he will fall. All that has changed from the enchanted past to the disenchanted present is our "conditions of belief." What defines our era as disenchanted is simply how we see ourselves and how we see our world. How then can we not recognize the crucial role that art, specifically literature, has the potential to play in altering our current condition? If literature is how we display ourselves to ourselves, then to show ourselves, over and over, a literary world and hero subjugated to the inevitability of a hollow and buffered existence, can only serve to strengthen and prolong the same state of affairs in our own world. It is for this reason, that Lukàcs' faithless and defeatist concept of the limitations of the novel must not be allowed to persist in the American mind as the image of all that American literature can achieve. Perhaps, because Lukàcs

was European, he did not know of the enchanted riches that remain, ever resistant, hidden in the American landscape. However, if we hope to win “the endless war against weakness and despair” we can no longer feed ourselves the image of our own profound disenchantment through the art we consume. American authors must rise to the challenge of producing for their readers literature that can be their “rally flags of hope and emulation”; they must show them hope for the “perfectibility of man,” even if it is a hope that they themselves are only just learning to believe in.

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